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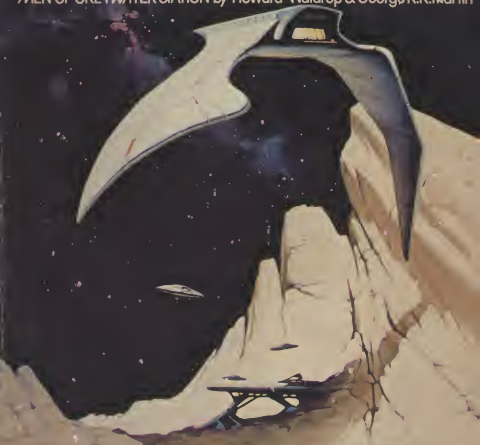
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AMAZING, Vol. 49, No. 5, March 1976 is published by ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO., INC., 29-42 23rd Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Editorial office: Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Subscription rates: One year (6 issues) United States and possessions \$4.00; Canada and Pan American Union countries and all other countries \$5.50. Change of address must be accompanied by a copy of the current issue. All correspondence should be sent to the editorial office, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Second class postage paid at Flushing, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 1976 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and a handling fee of 25¢ and will be handled with reasonable care, however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

TED
WHITE

EDITORIAL



DIVERSE TOPICS: I have a variety of items to comment and remark upon this time around, rather than one specific theme or point to be made. With that disclaimer out of the way, let's progress to the first of them.

Prentice Hall sent me a copy of James Gunn's *Alternate Worlds*, the subtitle of which is *The Illustrated History of Science Fiction*. It's a large book—what is known in the trade as a “coffee-table book”—and obviously its release was timed for the Christmas season, during which most “coffee-table books” are sold. At \$29.95, it's not a book your average student stf fan is going to run right out and buy—but it is exactly what his parents or fond relatives might purchase as a gift for him.

I have not as yet had the opportunity to read the book all the way through, but I have read several of the more interesting (to me) chapters and I've leafed through all the many illustrations and photographs.

My impression is that this is a book for which no real excuse existed—other than the hope that its sales would justify its publication. Gunn offers no new scholarship in either his pre-1926 history of the field's precursors, nor of the post-1926 events which he covers. As a text, the book is honest and competent, but hardly breaks new ground. I had the feeling, as I read it, that it was a book I could have written myself, with only my

own knowledge and that of previous historical studies (from Aldiss to Moskowitz to Panshin) before me. It read, indeed, like a book any one among us could have written. That may be enough for the publisher; it was not enough for me. I want to be offered either new facts or new insights in any new “history” of the field. I don't want to see the same old material dredged up yet again.

Yet, I cannot fault Gunn for this. He was not writing the book for me, but—presumably—for a larger audience which is somewhat less well informed and will find in *Alternate Worlds* at least a concise, if conventional look at the history and prehistory of our field.

But the way in which the book differs most sharply from those which preceded it is revealed in the subtitle, *The Illustrated History of Science Fiction*. This seems to be the season for books on stf illustration; I'm told there are at least six, of which I've seen two, one of which is edited by Lester del Rey. The others are, I gather, much shorter on text and devote most of their space to color plates of selected cover art. *Alternate Worlds* has a good number of color plates as well—in addition to a great many more black and white cuts, both photographs of individuals involved in the history of the field and reproductions of cover and interior art. The printing is handsome, but the selec-

(cont. on page 84)

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George Martin appeared here last issue with "The Computer Cried Charge!"; he returns with Howard Waldrop to tell a story about men under tension, faced with the horrifying prospect of having to confront others like them under the control of an alien intelligence. The question was—just how intelligent was that alien intelligence?" The answer would be a crucial one for the—

MEN OF GREYWATER STATION

**HOWARD WALDROP
& GEORGE R.R. MARTIN**

THE MEN of Greywater Station watched the shooting star descend and knew it for an omen.

They watched it in silence from the laser turret atop the central tower. The streak grew bright in the north-east sky, divided the night through the thin haze of the spore dust. It went through the zenith, sank, fell below the western horizon.

Sheridan, the bullet-headed zoologist, was the first to speak. "There they went," he said, unnecessarily.

Delvecchio shook his head. "There they are," he said, turning towards the others. There were only five there, of the seven who were left. Sanderpay and Miterz were still outside collecting samples.

"They'll make it," Delvecchio said firmly. "Took too long crossing the sky to burn up like a meteor. I hope we got a triangulation on them with the radar. They came in slow enough to maybe make it through the crash."

Reyn, the youngest of the men at

Greywater, looked up from the radar console, and nodded. "I got them, alright. Though it's a wonder they slowed enough before hitting the atmosphere. From the little that got through jamming, they must have been hit pretty hard out there."

"If they live, it puts us in a difficult position," said Delvecchio. "I'm not quite sure what comes next."

"I am," said Sheridan. "We get ready to fight. If anybody lives through the landing, we've got to get ready to take them on. They'll be crawling with fungus before they get here. And you know they'll come. We'll have to kill them."

Delvecchio eyed Sheridan with new distaste. The zoologist was always very vocal with his ideas. That didn't make it any easier for Delvecchio, who then had to end the arguments that Sheridan's ideas usually started. "Any other suggestions?" he asked, looking to the others.

Reyn looked hopeful. "We might try rescuing them before the fungus

Illustrated by STEPHEN E. FABIAN



takes over." He gestured towards the window, and the swampy, fungus-clotted landscape beyond. "We could maybe take one of the flyers to them, shuttle them back to the station, put them in the sterilization ward . . ." Then his words trailed off, and he ran a hand nervously through his thick black hair. "No. There'd be too many of them. We'd have to make so many trips. And the swampbats . . . I don't know."

"The vaccine," suggested Granowicz, the wiry extee psychologist. "Bring them some vaccine in a flyer. Then they might be able to walk it."

"The vaccine doesn't work right," Sheridan said. "People build up an immunity, the protection wears off. Besides, who's going to take it to them? You? Remember the last time we took a flyer out? The damn swampbats knocked it to bits. We lost Blatt and Ryerson. The fungus has kept us out of the air for nearly eight months now. So what makes you think it's all of a sudden going to give us a free pass to fly away into the sunset?"

"We've got to try," Reyn said hotly. From his tone, Delvecchio could see there was going to be a hell of an argument. Put Sheridan on one side of a fight and immediately Reyn was on the other.

"Those are men out there, you know," Reyn continued. "I think Ike's right—we can get them some vaccine. At least there's a chance. We can fight the swampbats. But those poor bastards out there don't have a chance against the fungus."

"They don't have a chance whatever we do," Sheridan said. "It's us we should worry about. They're finished. By now the fungus knows they're there. It's probably already at-

tacking them. If any survived."

"That seems to be the problem," said Delvecchio quickly, before Reyn could jump in again. "We have to assume some will survive. We also have to assume the fungus won't miss a chance to take them over. And that it will send them against us."

"Right!," said Sheridan, shaking his head vigorously. "And don't forget, these aren't ordinary people we're dealing with. That was a troop transport up there. The survivors will be armed to the teeth. What do we have besides the turret laser? Hunting rifles and specimen guns. And knives. Against screechers and 75 mikemikes and God knows what else. We're finished if we're not ready. Finished."

"Well, Jim?" Granowicz asked. "What do you think? Is he right? What do you think our chances are?"

Delvecchio sighed. Being the leader wasn't always a very comfortable position. "I know how you feel, Bill," he said with a nod to Reyn. "But I'm afraid I have to agree with Sheridan. Your scheme doesn't have much of a chance. And there are bigger stakes. If the survivors have screechers and heavy armament, they'll be able to breach the station walls. You all know what that would mean. Our supply ship is due in a month. If the fungus gets into Greywater, then Earth won't have to worry about the Fyndii anymore. The fungus would put a permanent stop to the war—it doesn't like its hosts to fight each other."

Sheridan was nodding again. "Yes. So we have to destroy the survivors. It's the only way."

Andrews, the quiet little mycologist, spoke up for the first time. "We might try to capture them," he suggested. "I've been experimenting with methods of killing

the fungus without damaging the hosts. We could keep them under sedation until I got somewhere."

"How many years would that take?" Sheridan snapped.

Delvecchio cut in. "No. We've got no reason to think we'll even be able to fight them, successfully. All the odds are with them. Capture would be clearly impossible."

"But rescue isn't." Reyn was still insistent. "We should gamble," he said, pounding the radar console with his fist. "It's worth it."

"We settled that, Bill," Delvecchio said. "No rescue. We've got only seven men to fight off maybe hundreds—I can't afford to throw any away on a useless dramatic gesture."

"Seven men trying to fight off hundreds sounds like a useless dramatic gesture to me," Reyn said. "Especially since there may be only a few survivors who could be rescued."

"But what if *all* of them are left?," said Sheridan. "And all of them have already been taken over by the fungus? Be serious, Reyn. The spore dust is everywhere. As soon as they breathe unfiltered air they'll take it in. And in 72 hours they'll be like the rest of the animal life on this planet. Then the fungus will send them against us."

"Goddammit, Sheridan!," yelled Reyn. "They could still be in their pods. Maybe they don't even know what happened. Maybe they're still asleep. How the hell do I know? If we get there before they come out, we can save them. Or something. We've got to try!"

"No. Look. The crash is sure to have shut the ship down. They'll be awake. First thing they'll do is check their charts. Only the fungus is classified, so they won't know what a hell of place they've landed on. All they

will know is that Greywater is the only human settlement here. They'll head towards us. And they'll get infected. And possessed."

"That's why we have to work fast," Reyn said. "We should arm three or four of the flyers and leave at once. Now."

Delvecchio decided to put an end to the argument. The last one like this had gone on all night. "This is getting us nowhere," he said sharply, fixing both Sheridan and Reyn with hard stares. "It's useless to discuss it any longer. All we're doing is getting mad at each other. Besides, it's late." He looked at his watch. "Let's break for six hours or so, and resume at dawn. When we're cooler and less tired. We'll be able to think more clearly. And Sanderpay and Miterz will be back then, too. They deserve a voice in this."

There were three rumbles of agreement. And one sharp note of dissent.

"No," said Reyn. Loudly. He stood up, towering over the others in their seats. "That's too late. There's no time to lose."

"Bill, you—" Delvecchio started.

"Those men might be grabbed while we sleep," Reyn went on, ploughing right over his superior. "We've got to *do* something."

"No," said Delvecchio. "And that's an order. We'll talk about it in the morning. Get some sleep, Bill."

Reyn looked around for support. He got none. He glared at Delvecchio briefly. Then he turned and left the tower.

DELVECCHIO had trouble sleeping. He woke up at least twice, between sheets that were cold and sticky with sweat. In his nightmare, he was out beyond Greywater, knee-deep in the

grey green slime, collecting samples for analysis. While he worked, he watched a big amphibious mud-tractor in the distance, wallowing towards him. On top was another human, his features invisible behind filtermask and skintins. The dream Delvecchio waved to the tractor as it neared, and the driver waved back. Then he pulled up nearby, climbed down from the cab, and grasped Delvecchio in a firm handshake.

Only by that time Delvecchio could see through the transparent filtermask. It was Ryerson, the dead geologist, his friend Ryerson. But his head was swollen grossly and there were trails of fungus hanging from each ear.

After the second nightmare he gave it up as a bad show. They had never found Ryerson or Blatt after the crash. Though they knew from the impact that there wouldn't be much to find. But Delvecchio dreamed of them often, and he suspected that some of the others did, too.

He dressed in darkness, and made his way to the central tower. Sanderpay, the telecom man, was on watch. He was asleep in the small ready bunk near the laser turret, where the station monitors could awaken him quickly if anything big approached the walls. Reinforced duralloy was tough stuff, but the fungus had some pretty wicked creatures at its call. And there were the airlocks to consider.

Delvecchio decided to let Sanderpay sleep, and went to the window. The big spotlights mounted on the wall flooded the perimeter around Greywater with bright white lights that made the mud glisten sickly. He could see drifting spores reflected briefly in the beams. They seemed unusually thick, especially toward the west, but that was probably his im-

agination.

Then again, it might be a sign that the fungus was uneasy. The spores had always been ten times as thick around Greywater as elsewhere on the planet's surface. That had been one of the first pieces of evidence that the damned fungus was intelligent. And hostile.

They still weren't sure just how intelligent. But of the hostility there was no more doubt. The parasitic fungus infected every animal on the planet. And had used most of them to attack the station at one point or another. It wanted them. So they had the blizzard of spores that rained on Greywater for more than a year now. The overhead force screens kept them out, though, and the sterilization chambers killed any that clung to mud-tractors or skintins or drifted into the airlocks. But the fungus kept trying.

Across the room, Sanderpay yawned and sat up in his bunk. Delvecchio turned towards him. "Morning, Otis."

Sanderpay yawned again, and stifled it with a big, red hand. "Morning," he replied, untangling himself from the bunk in a gangle of long arms and legs. "What's going on? You taking Bill's shift?"

Delvecchio stiffened. "What? Was Reyn supposed to relieve you?"

"Uh-huh," said Sanderpay, looking at the clock. "Hour ago. The bastard. I get cramps sleeping in this thing. Why can't we make it a little more comfortable, I ask you?"

Delvecchio was hardly listening. He ignored Sanderpay and moved swiftly to the intercom panel against one wall. Granowicz was closest to the motor pool. He rang him.

A sleepy voice answered. "Ike," Delvecchio said. "This is Jim. Check

the motor pool, quick. Count the flyers."

Granowicz acknowledged the order. He was back in less than two minutes, but it seemed longer. "Flyer five is missing," he said. He sounded awake all of a sudden.

"Shit," said Delvecchio. He slammed down the intercom, and whirled towards Sanderpay. "Get on the radio, fast. There's a flyer missing. Raise it."

Sanderpay looked baffled, but complied. Delvecchio stood over him, muttering obscenities and thinking worse ones, while he searched through the static.

Finally an answer. "I read you, Otis." Reyn's voice, of course.

Delvecchio leaned towards the transmitter. "I told you no rescue."

The reply was equal parts laughter and static. "Did you? Hell! I guess I wasn't paying attention, Jim. You know how long conferences always bored me."

"I don't want a dead hero on my hands. Turn back."

"I intend to. After I deliver the vaccine. I'll bring as many of the soldiers with me as I can. The rest can walk. The immunity wears off, but it should last long enough if they landed where we predict."

Delvecchio swore. "Dammit, Bill. Turn back. Remember Ryerson."

"Sure I do. He was a geologist. Little guy with a pot belly, wasn't he?"

"Reyn!" There was an edge to Delvecchio's voice.

Laughter. "Oh, take it easy, Jim. I'll make it. Ryerson was careless, and it killed him. And Blatt too. I won't be. I've rigged some lasers up. Already got two big swampbats that came at me. Huge fuckers, easy to burn down."

"Two! The fungus can send hun-

dreds if it gets an itch. Dammit, listen to me. Come back."

"Will do," said Reyn. "With my guests." Then he signed off with a laugh.

Delvecchio straightened, and frowned. Sanderpay seemed to think a comment was called for, and managed a limp, "Well . . ." Delvecchio never heard him.

"Keep on the frequency, Otis," he said. "There's a chance the damn fool might make it. I want to know the minute he comes back on." He started across the room. "Look. Try to raise him every five minutes or so. He probably won't answer. He's in for a world of shit if that jury-rigged laser fails him."

Delvecchio was at the intercom. He punched Granowicz' station. "Jim again, Ike. What kind of laser's missing from the shop? I'll hold on."

"No need to," came the reply. "Saw it just after I found the flyer gone. I think one of the standard tabletop cutters, low power job. He's done some spot-welding, left the stat on the powerbox. Ned found that, and places where he'd done some bracketing. Also, one of the vacutainers is gone."

"Okay. Thanks, Ike. I want everybody up here in ten minutes. War council."

"Oh, Sheridan will be so glad."

"No. Yes. Maybe he will." He clicked off, punched for Andrews.

The mycologist took awhile to answer. "Arnold?" Delvecchio snapped when the acknowledgement finally came. "Can you tell me what's gone from stores?"

There were a few minutes of silence. Then Andrews was back. "Yeah, Jim. A lot of medical supplies. Syringes, bandages, vaccine, plas-tisplints, even some body bags.

What's going on?"

"Reyn. And from what you say, it sounds like he's on a real mercy mission there. How much did he take?"

"Enough, I guess. Nothing we can't replace, however."

"Okay. Meeting up here in ten . . . five minutes."

"Well, all right." Andrews clicked off.

Delvecchio hit the master control, opening all the bitch boxes. For the first time in four months, since the slinkers had massed near the station walls. That had been a false alarm. This, he knew, wasn't.

"Meeting in five minutes in the turret," he said.

The words rang through the station, echoing off the cool humming walls.

66

• • • THAT IF we don't make plans now, it'll be way too late." Delvecchio paused and looked at the four men lounging on the chairs. Sanderpay was still at the radio, his long legs spilling into the center of the room. But the other four were clustered around the table, clutching coffee cups.

None of them seemed to be paying close attention. Granowicz was staring absently out the window, as usual, his eyes and forebrain mulling the fungus that grew on the trees around Greywater. Andrews was scribbling in a notepad, very slowly. Doodling. Ned Miterz, big and blond and blocky, was a bundle of nervous tension; Bill Reyn was his closest friend. He alternated between drumming his fingers on the tabletop, swilling his coffee, and tugging nervously at his drooping blond mustache. Sheridan's bullet-shaped head stared at the floor.

But they were all listening, in their way. Even Sanderpay, at the radio. When Delvecchio paused, he pulled

his long legs back under him, and began to speak. "I'm sorry it's come to this, Jim," he said, rubbing his ear to restore circulation. "It's bad enough those soldiers are out there. Now Bill is gone after them, and he's in the same spot. I think, well, we have to forget him. And worry about attacks."

Delvecchio sighed. "It's hard to take, I know. If he makes it, he makes it. If he finds them, he finds them. If they've been exposed, in three days they'll be part of the fungus. Whether they take the vaccine or not. If he brings them back, we watch them three days to see if symptoms develop. If they do, we have to kill them. If not, then nobody's hurt, and when the rest walk in we watch for symptoms in them. But those are iffy things. If he doesn't make it, he's dead. Chances are, the troopers are dead. Or exposed. Either way, we prepare for the worst and forget Reyn until we see him. So what I'm asking for now are practical suggestions as to how we defend ourselves against well-armed soldiers. Controlled by some intelligence we do not understand."

He looked at the men again.

Sanderpay whooped. He grabbed the console mike as they jumped and looked at him.

"Go ahead, Bill," he said, twisting the volume knob over to the wall speaker. The others winced as the roar of frequency noise swept the room.

" . . . right. The damn thing's sending insects into the ship. Smear . . . ing . . . smear windscreen. . . on instruments." Reyn's voice. There was a sound in the background like heavy rain.

" . . . swampbats just before they came . . . probably coming at me

now. Goddamn laser mount loosened . . .” There was a dull thud in the background. “No lateral control . . . got that bastard . . . ohmigoddd . . .” Two more dull thuds. A sound like metal eating itself.

“ . . . in the trees. Altitude . . . going down . . . swampbats . . . something just got sucked in the engine . . . Damn, no power . . . nothing . . . if . . .”

Followed by frequency noise.

Sanderpay, his thin face blank and white, waited a few seconds to see if more transmission came through, then tried to raise Reyn on the frequency. He turned the volume down again after a while.

“I think that’s about what we can expect will happen to us in a couple of days,” said Delvecchio. “That fungus will stop at nothing to get intelligent life. Once it has the soldiers who survive, they’ll come after the station. With their weapons.”

“Well,” snapped Sheridan. “He knew not to go out there in that flyer.”

Miterz slammed down his coffee cup, and rose. “Goddamn you, Sheridan. Can’t you hold it even a minute? Bill’s probably dead out there. And all you want to do is say I-told-you-so.”

Sheridan jumped to his feet too. “You think I like listening to someone get killed on the radio? Just because I didn’t like him? You think it’s fun? Huh? You think I want to fight somebody who’s been trained to do it? Huh?” He looked at them, all of them, and wiped the sweat from his brow with the back of his hand. “I don’t. I’m scared. I don’t like making plans for war when men could be out there wounded and dying with no help coming.”

He paused. His voice, stretched thin, began to waver. “Reyn was a

fool to go out there. But maybe he was the only one who let his humanity come through. I made myself ignore them. I tried to get you all to plan for war in case any of the soldiers made it. Damn you. I’m afraid to go out there. I’m afraid to go near the stuff, even inside the station. I’m a zoologist, but I can’t even work. Every animal on the planet has that—that *stuff* on it. I can’t bear to touch it. I don’t want to fight either. But we’re going to have to. Sooner or later.”

He wiped his head again, looked at Delvecchio. “I—I’m sorry, Jim. Ned, too. The rest of you. I’m—I have—I just don’t like it any more than you. But we have to.” He sat down, very tiredly.

Delvecchio rubbed his nose, and reflected again that being the nominal leader was more trouble than it was worth. Sheridan had never opened up like this before. He wasn’t quite sure how to deal with it.

“Look,” he finally said. “It’s okay, Eldon.” It was the first time he could remember that he—or any of them—had used Sheridan’s first name. “This isn’t going to be easy on any of us. You may be right about our humanity. Sometimes you have to put humanity aside to think about . . . well, I don’t know.”

“The fungus has finally found a way to get to us. It will attack us with the soldiers, like it has with the slinkers and the swampbats and the rest. Like it’s trying to do now, while we’re talking, with the borrowing worms and the insects and the arthropodia. The station’s defenses will take care of those. All we have to worry about are the soldiers.”

“All?” said Granowicz, sharply.

“That, and what we’ll do if they breach the wall or the fields. The

field wasn't built to take screechers or lasers or explosives. Just to keep out insects and flying animals. I think one of the first things we've got to do is find a way to beef up the field. Like running in the mains from the other power sources. But that still leaves the wall. And the entry chambers. Our weakest links. Ten or twenty good rounds of high explosives will bring it right down. How do we fight back?"

"Maybe we don't," said Miterz. His face was still hard and angry. But now the anger was turned against the fungus, instead of Sheridan. "Maybe we take the fight to them."

The suggestions flew thick and fast from there on. Half of them were impossible, a quarter improbable, the most of what were left were crazy. At the end of an hour, they had gotten past the points of mining, pitfalls, electrocution. To Delvecchio's ears, it was the strangest conversation he had ever heard. It was full of the madnesses men plan against each other, made more strange by the nature of the men themselves. They were all scientists and technicians, not soldiers, not killers. They talked and planned without enthusiasm, with the quiet talk of men who must talk before being pallbearers at a friend's funeral, or the pace of men who must take their turns as members of a firing squad the next morning.

In a way, they were.

AN HOUR LATER, Delvecchio was standing up to his ankles in graygreen mud, wrestling with a powersaw and sweating freely under his skinthins. The saw was hooked up to the power supply on his mud-tractor. And Miterz was sitting atop the tractor, with a hunting laser resting across his knee, occasionally lifting it to burn

down one of the slinkers slithering through the underbrush.

Delvecchio had already cut through the bases of four of the biggest trees around the Greywater perimeter—about three quarters of the way through, anyway. Just enough to weaken them, so the turret laser could finish the job quickly when the need arose. It was a desperate idea. But they were desperate men.

The fifth tree was giving him trouble. It was a different species from the others, gnarled and overhung with creepers and rock-hard. He was only halfway through, and already he'd had to change the blade twice. That made him edgy. One slip with the blade, one slash in the skinthins, and the spores could get at him.

"Damn thing," he said, when the teeth began to snap off for the third time. "It cuts like it's half petrified. Damn."

"Look at the bright side," suggested Miterz. "It'll make a mighty big splat when it falls. And even duralloy armor should crumple pretty good."

Delvecchio missed the humor. He changed the blade without comment, and resumed cutting.

"That should do it," he said after a while. "Looks deep enough. But maybe we should use the lasers on this kind, if we hit any more of them."

"That's a lot of power," said Miterz. "Can we afford it?" He raised his laser suddenly, and fired at something behind Delvecchio. The slinker, a four foot long mass of scales and claws, reared briefly from its stomach and then fell again, splattering mud in their direction. Its dying scream was a brief punctuation mark. "Those things are thick today," Miterz commented.

Delvecchio climbed up into the

tractor. "You're imagining things," he said.

"No I'm not." Miterz sounded serious. "I'm the ecologist, remember? I know we don't have a natural ecology around here. The fungus sends us its nasties, and keeps the harmless life forms away. But now there's even more than usual." He gestured with the laser. Off through the underbrush, two big slinkers could be seen chewing at the creepers around a tree, the fungus hanging like a shroud over the back of their skulls. "Look there. What do you think they're doing?"

"Eating," said Delvecchio. "That's normal enough." He started the tractor, and moved it forward jerkily. Mud, turned into a watery slime, spouted out behind the vehicle in great gushes.

"Slinkers are omnivores," Miterz said. "But they prefer meat. Only eat creepers when there's no prey. But there's plenty around here." He stopped, stared at the scene, banged the butt of the laser rifle on the cab floor in a fit of sudden nervous tension.

Then he resumed in a burst of words. "Damn it, damn it. They're clearing a path!" His voice was an accusation. "A path for the soldiers to march on. Starting at our end and working towards them. They'll get here faster if they don't have to cut through the undergrowth."

Delvecchio, at the wheel, snorted. "Don't be absurd."

"What makes you think it's absurd? Who knows what the fungus is up to? A living ecology. It can turn every living thing on this planet against us if it wants to. Eating a path through a swamp is nothing to something like that." Miterz' voice was distant and brooding.

Delvecchio didn't like the way the conversation was going. He kept silent. They went on to the next tree, and then the next. But Miterz, his mind racing, was getting more and more edgy. He kept fidgeting in the tractor, and playing with the rifle, and more than once he absently tried to yank at his mustache, only to be stopped by the filtermask. Finally, Delvecchio decided it was time to head in.

Decontamination took the usual two hours. They waited patiently in the entry chamber and sterilization rooms while the pumps, sprays, heatlamps, and ultraviolet systems did their work on them and the tractor.

They shed their sterilized skinthins as they came through the final airlock.

"Goddamn," said Delvecchio. "I hope we don't have to go out again. Decom takes more time than getting the work done."

Sanderpay met them, smiling. "I think I found something we could use. Nearly forgot about them."

"Yeah? What?," Miterz asked, as he unloaded the laser charge and placed it back in the recharge rack. He punched several buttons absently.

"The sounding rockets."

Delvecchio slapped his head. "Of course. Damn. Didn't even consider them." His mind went back. Blatt, the dead meteorologist, had fired off the six foot sounding rockets regularly for the first few weeks, gaining data on the fungus. They had discovered that spores were frequently found up to 50,000 feet, and a few even reached as high as 80,000. After Blatt discovered that, he still made a twice-daily ritual of firing the sounding rockets, to collect information on the planet's shifting wind patterns. They had weather balloons, but those were next to useless; the swampbats

usually vectored in on them soon after they were released. After Blatt's death, however, the readings hadn't meant as much, so the firings were discontinued. But the launching tubes were still functional, as far as he knew.

"You think you can rig them up as small guided missiles?" Delvecchio asked.

"Yep," Sanderpay said with a grin. "I already started. But they won't be very accurate. For one thing, they'll reach about a mile in altitude before we can begin to control them. Then we'll be forcing the trajectory. They'll want to continue in a long arc. We'll want them back down almost to the launching point. It'll be like wrestling a two-headed alligator. I'm thinking of filling half of them with that explosive Andrews is trying to make, and the rest with white phosphorus. But that might be tricky."

"Well, do whatever you can, Otis," said Delvecchio. "This is good news. We needed this kind of punch. Maybe it isn't as hopeless as I thought."

Miterz had been listening carefully, but he still looked glum. "Anything over the commo?" he put in. "From Bill?"

Sanderpay shook his head. "Just the usual solar shit, and some mighty nice whistlers. Must be a helluva thunderstorm somewhere within a thousand miles of here. I'll let you know if anything comes in, though."

Miterz didn't answer. He was looking at the armory and shaking his head.

Delvecchio followed his eyes. Eight lasters were on the racks. Eight lasers and sixteen charges, standard station allotment. Each charge good for maybe 50 fifth-second bursts. Five tranquilizer rifles, an assortment of

syringes, darts, and projectiles. All of which would be useless against armored infantry. Maybe if they could adapt some of the heavier projectiles to H.E. . . . but such a small amount wouldn't dent duralloy. Hell.

"You know," said Miterz. "If they get inside, we might as well hang it up."

"If," said Delvecchio.

NIGHT AT Greywater Station. They had started watch-and-watch. Andrews was topside at the laser turret and sensor board. Delvecchio, Granowicz, and Sanderpay lingered over dinner in the cafeteria below. Miterz and Sheridan had already turned in.

Sanderpay was talking of the day's accomplishments. He figured he had gotten somewhere with the rockets. And Andrews had managed to put together some explosive from the ingredients in Reyn's lab.

"Arnold doesn't like it much, though," Sanderpay was saying. "He wants to get back to his fungus samples. Says he's out of his field, and not too sure he knows what he's doing. He's right, too. Bill was your chemist."

"Bill isn't here," Delvecchio snapped. He was in no mood for criticism. "Someone has to do it. At least Arnold has some background in organic chemistry, no matter how long ago it was. That's more than the rest of us have." He shook his head. "Am I supposed to do it? I'm an entomologist. What good is that? I feel useless."

"Yep, I know," said Sanderpay. "Still. It's not easy for me with the rockets, either. I had to take half the propellant from each one. Worked nine hours, finished three. We're gonna be fighting all the known laws

of aerodynamics trying to force those things down near their starting point. And everybody else is having problems, too. We tinker and curse and it's all a blind alley. If we do this, we gotta do that. But if we do that, it won't work. This is a research station. So maybe it looks like a fort. That doesn't make it one. And we're scientists, not demolitions experts."

Granowicz gave a thin chuckle. "I'm reminded of that time, back on Earth, in the 20th Century, when that German scientist . . . von Brau? von . . . Von Braun and his men were advised that the enemy forces would soon be there. The military began giving them close-order drill and marksmanship courses. They wanted them to meet the enemy on the very edge of their missile complex and fight them hand to hand."

"What happened?," said Sanderpay.

"Oh, they ran 300 miles and surrendered," Granowicz replied dryly.

Delvecchio downed his two hundredth cup of coffee, and put his feet up on the table. "Great," he said. "Only we've got no place to run to. So we're going to *have* to meet them on the edge of *our* little missile complex, or whatever. And soon."

Granowicz nodded. "Three days from now, I figure."

"That's if the fungus doesn't help them," said Delvecchio.

The other two looked at him. "What do you mean?" asked Granowicz.

"When Ned and I were out this morning, we saw slinkers. Lots of them. Eating away at the creepers to the west of the station."

Granowicz had a light in his eyes. But Sanderpay, still baffled, said, "So?"

"Miterz thinks they're clearing a path."

"Uh oh," said Granowicz. He stroked his chin with a thin hand. "That's very interesting, and very bad news. Clearing away at both ends, and all along, as I'd think it would do. Hmmm."

Sanderpay looked from Delvecchio to Granowicz and back, grimaced, uncoiled his legs and then coiled them around his chair again in a different position. He said nothing.

"Ah, yes, yes," Granowicz was saying. "It all fits, all ties in. We should have anticipated this. A total assault, with the life of a planet working for our destruction. It's the fungus . . . a total ecology, as Ned likes to call it. A classic case of the parasitic collective mind. But we can't understand it. We don't know what its basic precepts are, its formative experiences. We don't know. No research has been carried out on anything like it. Except maybe the water jellies of Noborn. But that was a collective organism formed of separate colonies for mutual benefit. A benign form, as it were. As far as I can tell, Greywater, the fungus, is a single, all-encompassing mass, which took over this planet starting from some single central point."

He rubbed his hands together and nodded. "Yes. Based on that, we can make guesses as to what it thinks. And how it will act. And this fits, this total hostility."

"How so?" asked Sanderpay.

"Well, it's never run up against any other intelligence, you see. Only lower forms. That's important. So it judges us by itself, the only mind it has known. *It* is driven to dominate, to take over all life with which it comes in contact. So it thinks we are the same, fears that we are trying to take over this planet as *it* once did.

"Only, like I've been saying all

along, it doesn't see us as the intelligence. We're animals, small, mobile. It's known life like that before, and all lower form. But the station itself is something new, something outside its experience. It sees the station as the intelligence, I'll bet. An intelligence like itself. Landing, establishing itself, sending out extensions, poking at it and its hosts. And us, us poor animals, the fungus sees as unimportant tools."

Delvecchio sighed. "Yeah, Ike. We've heard this before. I agree that it's a persuasive theory. But how do you prove it?"

"Proof is all around us," said Granowicz. "The station is under a constant, around-the-clock attack. But we can go outside for samples, and the odds are fifty-fifty whether we'll be attacked or not. Why? Well, we don't kill every slinker we see, do we? Of course not. And the fungus doesn't try to kill us, except if we get annoying. Because we're not important, it thinks. But something like the flyers—mobile but not animal, strange—it tries to eradicate. Because it perceives them as major extensions of Greywater."

"Then why the spores?" Delvecchio said.

Granowicz dismissed that with an airy wave. "Oh, the fungus would like to take us over, sure. To deprive the station of hosts. But it's the station it wants to eradicate. It can't conceive of cooperating with another intelligence—maybe, who knows, it had to destroy rival fungus colonies of its own species before it came to dominate this planet. Once it perceives intelligence, it is threatened. And it perceives intelligence in the station."

He was going to go on. But Delvecchio suddenly took his feet from the table, sat up, and said, "Uh oh."

Granowicz frowned. "What?"

Delvecchio stabbed at him with a finger. "Ike, think about this theory of yours. What if you're right? Then *how* is the fungus going to perceive the spaceship?"

Granowicz thought a moment, nodded to himself, and gave a slow, low whistle.

"So? How?" said Sanderpay. "Whattaya talking about?"

Granowicz turned on him. "The spaceship was mobile, but not animal. Like the station. It came out of the sky, landed, destroyed a large area of the fungus and host forms. And hasn't moved since. Like the station. The fungus probably sees it as another station, another threat. Or an extension of our station."

"Yes," said Delvecchio. "But it gets worse. If you're right, then maybe the fungus is launching an all-out attack right at this moment—on the spaceship hull. While it lets the men march away unharmed."

There was a moment of dead silence. Sanderpay finally broke it, looking at each of the others in turn, and saying, in a low voice, "Oh. Wow. I see."

Granowicz had a thoughtful expression on his face, and he was rubbing his chin again. "No," he said at last. "You'd think that, but I don't think that's what is happening."

"Why not?" asked Delvecchio.

"Well, the fungus may not see the soldiers as the major threat. But it would at least try to take them over, as it does with us. And once it had them, and their weapons, it would have the tools to obliterate the station *and* the spaceship. That's almost sure to happen, too. Those soldiers will be easy prey for the spores. They'll fall to the fungus like ripe fruit."

Delvecchio clearly looked troubled.

"Yeah, probably. But this bothers me. If there's even a slight chance that the soldiers might get here without being taken over, we'll have to change our plans."

"But there's no chance of that," Granowicz said, shaking his head. "The fungus already *has* those men. Why else would it be clearing a path?"

Sanderpay nodded in agreement. But Delvecchio wasn't that sure.

"We don't *know* that it's clearing a path," he insisted. "That's just what Miterz *thinks* is happening. Based on very scant evidence. We shouldn't accept it as an accomplished fact."

"It makes sense, though," Granowicz came back. "It would speed up the soldiers getting here, speed up the . . ."

The alarm from the turret began to hoot and clang.

"**S**LINKERS," said Andrews. "I think out by those trees you were working on." He drew on a pair of infrared goggles and depressed a stud on the console. There was a hum.

Delvecchio peered through the binoculars. "Think maybe it's sending them to see what we were up to?"

"Definitely," said Granowicz, standing just behind him and looking out the window from over his shoulder.

"I don't think it'll do anything," said Delvecchio, hopefully. "Mines or anything foreign it would destroy, of course. We've proved that. But all we did is slash a few trees. I doubt that it will be able to figure out why."

"Do you think I should fire a few times?" Andrews asked from the laser console.

"I don't know," said Delvecchio. "Wait a bit. See what they do."

The long, thick lizards were moving around the tree trunks. Some

slithered through the fungus and the mud, others scratched and clawed at the notched trees.

"Switch on some of the directional sensors," said Delvecchio. Sanderpay, at the sensor bank, nodded and began flicking on the directional mikes. First to come in was the constant tick of the continual spore bombardment on the receiver head. Then, as the mike rotated, came the hissing screams of the slinkers.

And then the rending sound of a falling tree.

Delvecchio, watching through the binoculars, suddenly felt very cold. The tree came down into the mud with a crashing thud. Slime flew from all sides, and several slinkers hissed out their lives beneath the trunk.

"Shit," said Delvecchio. And then, "Fire, Arnold."

Andrews pushed buttons, sighted in the nightscope, lined the crossnotches up on a slinker near the fallen tree, and fired.

To those not watching through goggles or binoculars, a tiny red-white light appeared in the air between the turret laser and the group of lizards. A gargling sound mixed with the slinker hissing. One of the animals thrashed suddenly, and then lay still. The others began slithering away into the undergrowth. There was stillness for a second.

And on another part of the perimeter, a second tree began to fall.

Andrews hit more buttons, and the big turret laser moved and fired again. Another slinker died. Then, without waiting for another crash, the laser began to swivel to hit the slinkers around the other trees.

Delvecchio lowered the binoculars very slowly. "I think we just wasted a day's work out there," he said. "Somehow the fungus guessed what

we were up to. It's smarter than we gave it credit for."

"Reyn," said Granowicz.

"Reyn?" said Delvecchio. With a questioning look.

"He knew we'd try to defend the station. Given that knowledge, it's logical for the fungus to destroy anything we do out there. Maybe Reyn survived the crash of his flyer. Maybe the fungus finally got a human."

"Oh, *shit*," said Delvecchio, with expression. "Yes, sure, you might be right. Or maybe it's all a big coincidence. A bunch of accidents. How do we know? How do we know anything about what the damned thing is thinking or doing or planning?" He shook his head. "*Damn*. We're fighting blind. Every time something happens, there are a dozen reasons that might have been behind it. And every plan we make has to have a dozen alternatives."

"It's not that bad," said Granowicz. "We're not entirely in the dark. We've proved that the fungus *can* take over Earth forms. We've proved that it gets at least some knowledge from them; that it absorbs at least part of what they knew. We don't know how big a part, true, however—"

"However, if, but, maybe," Delvecchio swore, looking very disgusted. "Dammit, Ike, how big a part is the crucial question. *If* it has Reyn, and *if* it knows everything he knew, then it knows everything there is to know about Greywater and its defenses. In that case, what kind of a chance will we have?"

"Well," said Granowicz. He paused, frowned, stroked his chin. "I—hmmmm. Wait, there are other aspects to this that should be thought out. Let me work on this a while."

"Fine," said Delvecchio. "You do

that." He turned to Andrews. "Arnold, keep them off the trees as best you can. I'll be back up to relieve you in four hours."

Andrews nodded. "Okay, I think," he said, his eyes locked firmly on the nightscope.

Delvecchio gave brief instructions to Sanderpay, then turned and left the turret. He went straight to his bunk. It took him the better part of an hour to drift to sleep.

D ELVECCHIO'S DREAM:

He was old, and cool. He saw the station from all sides in a shifting montage of images; some near the ground, some from above, wheeling on silent wings. In one image, he saw, or felt it as a worm must feel the presence of the heavy weight of sunlight.

He saw the station twisted, old, wrecked. He saw the station in a series of images from inside. He saw a skeleton in the corner of an indefinite lab, and saw through the eyes of the skull out into the broken station. Outside, he saw heaped duralloy bodies with greygreen growths sprouting from the cracked faceplates.

And he saw out of the faceplates, out into the swamp. Everywhere was greygreen, and damp and old and cold. Everywhere.

Delvecchio awoke sweating.

HIS WATCH was uneventful. The slinkers had vanished as suddenly as they had assembled, and he only fired the laser once, at a careless swampbat that flew near the perimeter. Miterz relieved him. Delvecchio caught several more hours of sleep. Or at least of bunk time. He spent a large chunk of the time lying awake, thinking.

When he walked into the cafeteria the next morning, an argument was

raging.

Granowicz turned to him immediately. "Jim, listen," he began, gesturing with his hands. "I've thought about this all night. We've been missing something obvious. If this thing has Reyn, or the soldiers, or *any* human, this is the chance we've been waiting for. The chance to communicate, to begin a mutual understanding. With their knowledge, it will have a common tongue with us. We shouldn't fight it at all. We should try to talk to it, try to make it understand how different we are."

"You're crazy, Granowitz," Sheridan said loudly. "Stark, raving mad. *You* go talk to that stuff. Not me. It's after us. It's been after us all along, and now it's sending those soldiers to kill us all. We have to kill them first."

"But this is our *chance*," Granowicz said. "To begin to understand, to reach that mind, to—"

"That was your job all along," Sheridan snapped. "You're the extee psych. Just because you didn't do your job is no reason to ask us to risk our lives to do it for you."

Granowicz glowered. Sanderpay, sitting next to him, was more vocal. "Sheridan," he said, "sometimes I wish we could throw you out to the fungus. You'd look good with gray-green growths coming out of your ears. Yep."

Delvecchio gave hard glances to all of them. "Shut up, all of you," he said simply. "I've had enough of this nonsense. I've been doing some thinking too."

He pulled up a chair and sat down. Andrews was at another table, quietly finishing his breakfast. Delvecchio motioned him over, and he joined them.

"I've got some things I want to announce," Delvecchio said. "Number

one, no more arguments. We waste an incredible amount of time hashing out every detail and yelling at each other. And we don't have time to waste. So no more. I make the decisions, and I don't want any screaming and kicking. If you don't like it, you're free to elect another leader. Understand?" He looked at each of them in turn. Sheridan squirmed a little under the gaze, but none of them objected.

"Okay," Delvecchio said finally. "If that's settled, then we'll move on." He looked at Granowicz. "First thing is this idea of yours, Ike. Now you want us to talk. Sorry, I don't buy it. Just last night you were telling us how the fungus, because of its childhood traumas, was bound to be hostile."

"Yes," began Granowicz, "but with the additional knowledge it will get from—"

"No arguments," Delvecchio said sharply. Granowicz subsided. Delvecchio continued. "What do you think it will be doing while we're talking? Hitting us with everything it's got, if your theory was correct. And it sounded good to me. We're dead men if we're not ready, so we'll be ready. To fight, not talk."

Sheridan was smirking. Delvecchio turned on him next. "But we're not going to hit them with everything we've got as soon as we see them, like you want, Sheridan," he said. "Ike brought up a point last night that's been bothering me ever since. Nagging at me. There's an outside chance the fungus might not even try to take over the soldiers. It might not be smart enough to realize they're important. It might concentrate on the spaceship."

Sheridan sat up straight. "We *have* to hit them," he said. "They'll kill us,

Delvecchio. You don't—"

Sanderpay, surprisingly, joined in. "It's eating a path," he said. "And the trees. And this morning, Jim, look out there. Slinkers and swampbats all around. It's got them, I know it. It wouldn't be building up this way otherwise."

Delvecchio waved them both silent. "I know, Otis, I know. You're right. All the signs say that it has them. But we have to be sure. We wait until we see them, until we *know*. Then, if they're taken, hit them with everything, at once. It has to be hard. If it becomes a struggle, we've lost. They outnumber and outgun us, and in a fight, they'd breach the station easy. Only the fungus might just march 'em up. Maybe we can kill them all before they know what hit them."

Granowicz looked doubtful. Sheridan looked more than doubtful. "Delvecchio, that's ridiculous. Every moment we hesitate increases our risk. And for such a ridiculous chance. Of course it will take them."

"Sheridan, I've had about enough out of you," Delvecchio said quietly. "Listen for a change. There's two chances. One that the fungus might be too dumb to take them over. And one that it might be too smart."

Granowicz raised his eyebrows. Andrews cleared his throat. Sheridan just looked insulted.

"If it has Reyn," Delvecchio said, "maybe it knows all about us. Maybe it won't take the soldiers over on purpose. It knows from Reyn that we plan to destroy them. Maybe it will just wait."

"But why would it have slinkers clearing a . . .," Sanderpay began, then shut up. "Oh. Oh, no. Jim, it couldn't . . ."

"You're not merely assuming the fungus is very intelligent, Jim,"

Granowicz said. "You're assuming it's very devious as well."

"No," said Delvecchio. "I'm not assuming *anything*. I'm merely pointing out a possibility. A terrible possibility, but one we should be ready for. For over a year now, we've been constantly underestimating the fungus. At every test, it has proven just a bit more intelligent than we figured. We can't make another mistake like that. No margin for error this time."

Granowicz gave a reluctant nod.

"There's more," said Delvecchio. "I want those missiles finished *today*, Otis. In case they get here sooner than we've anticipated. And the explosive too, Arnold. And I don't want any more griping. You two are relieved of your watches until you finish those projects. The rest of us will double up."

"Also, from now on we all wear skinthins inside the station. In case the attack comes suddenly and the screens are breached."

Everybody was nodding.

"Finally, we throw out all the experiments. I want every bit of fungus and every Greywater life form within this station eradicated." Delvecchio thought of his dream again, and shuddered mentally.

Sheridan slapped the table, and smiled. "Now *that's* the kind of thing I like to hear! I've wanted to get rid of those things for weeks."

Granowicz looked unhappy, though. And Andrews looked very unhappy. Delvecchio looked at each in turn.

"All I have is a few small animals, Jim," Granowicz said. "Rootsnuffs and such. They're harmless enough, and safely enclosed. I've been trying to reach the fungus, establish some sort of communications—"

"No," said Delvecchio. "Sorry, Ike, but we can't take the chance. If the

walls are breached or the station damaged, we might lose power. Then we'd have contamination inside and out. It's too risky. You can get new animals."

Andrews cleared his throat. "But, well, my cultures," he said. "I'm just getting them broken down, isolating the properties of the fungus strains. Six months of research, Jim, and, well, I think—" He shook his head.

"You've got your research. You can duplicate it. If we live through this."

"Yes, well—" Andrews was hesitant. "But the cultures will have to be started over. So much time. And Jim—" He hesitated again, and looked at the others.

Delvecchio smiled grimly. "Go ahead, Arnold. They might die soon. Maybe they should know."

Andrews nodded. "I'm getting somewhere, Jim. With *my* work, the real work, the whole reason for Greywater. I've bred a mutation of the fungus, a non-intelligent variety, very virulent, very destructive of its hosts.

"I'm in the final stages now. It's only a matter of getting the mutant to breed in the Fyndii atmosphere. And I'm near, I'm so near." He looked at each of them in turn, eyes imploring. "If you let me continue, I'll have it soon. And they could dump it on the Fyndii homeworlds, and well, it would end the war. All those lives saved. Think about all the men who will die if I'm delayed."

He stopped suddenly, awkwardly. There was a long silence around the table.

Granowicz broke it. He stroked his chin and gave a funny little chuckle. "And I thought this was such a bold, clean venture," he said, his voice bitter. "To grope towards a new intelligence, unlike any we had known, to

try to find and talk to a mind perhaps unique in this universe. And now you tell me all my work was a decoy for biological warfare. Even here I can't get away from that damned war." He shook his head. "Greywater Station. What a lie."

"It had to be this way, Ike," Delvecchio said. "The potential for military application was too great to pass up, but the Fyndii would have easily found out about a big, full-scale biowar research project. But teams like Greywater's—routine planetary investigation teams—are common. The Fyndii can't bother to check on every one. And they don't."

Granowicz was staring at the table. "I don't suppose it matters," he said glumly. "We all may die in a few days anyway. This doesn't change that. But—but—" He stopped.

Delvecchio shrugged. "I'm sorry, Ike." He looked at Andrews. "And I'm sorry about the experiments, too, Arnold. But your cultures have to go. They're a danger to us inside the station."

"But, well, the war—all those people." Andrews looked anguished.

"If we don't make it through this, we lose it all anyway, Arnold," Delvecchio said.

Sanderpay put a hand on Andrews' shoulder. "He's right. It's not worth it."

Andrews nodded.

Delvecchio rose. "All right," he said. "We've got that settled. Now we get to work. Arnold, the explosives. Otis, the rockets. Ike and I will take care of dumping the experiments. But first, I'm going to go brief Miterz. Okay?"

The answer was a weak chorus of agreement.

IT TOOK THEM only a few hours to

destroy the work of a year. The rockets, the explosives, and the other defenses took longer, but in time they too were ready. And then they waited, sweaty and nervous and uncomfortable in their skinthins.

Sanderpay monitored the commo system constantly. One day. Two. Three—a day of incredible tension. Four, and the strain began to tell. Five, and they relaxed a bit. The enemy was late.

"You think they'll try to contact us first?" Andrews asked at one point.

"I don't know," said Sanderpay. "Have you thought about it?"

"I have," Granowicz put in. "But it doesn't matter. They'll try either way. If it's them, they'll want to reach us, of course. If it's the fungus, it'll want to throw us off our guard. Assuming that it has absorbed enough knowledge from its hosts to handle a transmission, which isn't established. Still, it will probably try, so we can't trust a transmission."

"Yeah," said Delvecchio. "But that's the problem. We can't trust *anything*. We have to suppose everything we're working on. We don't have *any* concrete information to speak of."

"I know, Jim, I know."

ON THE SIXTH DAY, the storm screamed over the horizon. Spore clouds flowed by in the wind, whipped into rents and gaps. Overhead, the sky darkened. Lightning sheeted in the west.

The radio screeched its agony and crackled. Whistlers moved up and down the scale. Thunder rolled. In the tower, the men of Greywater station waited out the last few hours.

The voice had come in early that morning, had faded. Nothing intelligible had come through. Static had

crackled most of the day. The soldiers were moving on the edge of the storm, Delvecchio calculated.

Accident? Or planning? He wondered. And deployed his men. Andrews to the turret laser. Sanderpay at the rocket station. Sheridan and himself inside the station, with laser rifles. Granowicz to the flyer port, where the remaining flyers had been stocked with crude bombs. Miterz on the walls.

They waited in their skinthins, filtermasks locked on but not in place. The sky, darkened by the coming storm, was blackening toward twilight anyway. Soon night and the storm would reach Greywater Station hand in hand.

Delvecchio stalked through the halls impatiently. Finally, he returned to the tower to see what was happening. Andrews, at the laser console, was watching the window. A can of beer sat next to him on the night-scope. Delvecchio had never seen the quiet little mycologist drink before.

"They're out there," Andrews said. "Somewhere." He sipped at his beer, put it down again. "I wish that, well, they'd hurry or something." He looked at Delvecchio. "We're all probably going to die, you know. The odds are so against us."

Delvecchio didn't have the stomach to tell him he was wrong. He just nodded, and watched the window. All the lights in the station were out. Everything was down but the generators, the turret controls, and the forcefield. The field, fed with the extra power, was stronger than ever. But strong enough? Delvecchio didn't know.

Near the field perimeter, seven or eight ghosting shapes wheeled against the storm. They were all wings and claw, and a long, razor-barbed tail.

Swampbats. Big ones, with six foot wingspans.

They weren't alone. The underbrush was alive with slinkers. And the big leeches could be seen in the water near the south wall. All sorts of life was being picked up by the sensors.

Driven before the storm? Or massing for the attack? Delvecchio didn't know that, either.

The tower door opened, and Sheridan entered. He threw his laser rifle on the table near the door. "These are useless," he said. "We can't use them unless they get inside. Or unless we go out to meet them, and I'm not going to do *that*. Besides, what good will they do against all the stuff they've got?"

Delvecchio started to answer. But Andrews spoke first. "Look out there," he said softly. "More swampbats. And that other thing. What is it?"

Delvecchio looked. Something else was moving through the sky, on slowly moving leathery wings. It was black, and *big*. Twice the size of a swampbat.

"The first expedition named them hellions," Delvecchio said after a long pause. "They're native to the mountains. A thousand miles from here." Another pause. "That clinches it."

There was general movement on the ground and in the water to the west of Greywater Station. Echoes of thunder rolled. And then, piercing the thunder, came a shrill, whooping shriek.

"What was *that*?" Sheridan asked.

Andrews was white. "That one I know," he said. "It's called a screecher. A sonic rifle, breaks down cell walls with concentrated sound. I saw them used once. I—it almost makes flesh liquify."

"God," said Sheridan.

Delvecchio moved to the intercom. Every box in the station was on, full volume. "Battle stations, gentlemen," he said, flipping down his filtermask. "And good luck."

Delvecchio moved out into the hall and down the stairs. Sheridan picked up his laser and followed. At the base of the stairs, Delvecchio motioned for him to stop. "You stay here, Eldon. I'll take the main entry port."

Rain had begun to spatter the swamps around Greywater, although the field kept it off the station. A great sheet of wind roared from the west. And suddenly the storm was no longer approaching. It was here. The blurred outline of the force bubble could be seen against the churning sky.

Delvecchio strode across the yards, through the halls, and cycled through decon quickly to the main entry port. A large viewplate gave the illusion of a window. Delvecchio watched it, sitting on the hood of a mud-tractor. The intercom box was on the wall next to him.

"Burrowing animals are moving against the underfield, Jim," Andrews reported from the turret. "We're getting, oh, five or six shock outputs a minute. Nothing we can't handle, however."

He fell silent again, and the only noise was the thunder. Sanderpay began to talk, gabbing about the rockets. Delvecchio was hardly listening. The perimeter beyond the walls was a morass of rain-whipped mud. Delvecchio could see little. He switched from the monitor he was tuned to, and picked up the turret cameras. He and Andrews watched with the same eyes.

"Underfield contacts are up," Andrews said suddenly. "A couple of

dozen a minute now."

The swampbats were wheeling closer to the perimeter, first one, then another, skirting the very edge of the field, riding terribly and silently on the wet winds. The turret laser rotated to follow each, but they were gone before it could fire.

Then there was motion on the ground. A wave of slinkers began to cross the perimeter. The laser wheeled, depressed. A spurt of light appeared, leaving a quick-vanishing roil of steam. One slinker died, then another.

On the south, a leech rose from the grey waters near the basewall of the station. The turret turned. Two quick spurts of red burned. Steam rose once. The leech twisted at the second burst.

Delvecchio nodded silently, clutched his rifle tighter.

And Andrews' voice came over the intercom. "There's a man out there," he said. "Near you, Jim."

Delvecchio slipped on his infrared goggles, and flicked back to the camera just outside the entry port. There was a dim shape in the undergrowth.

"Just one?," asked Delvecchio.

"All I read," Andrews said.

Delvecchio nodded, and thought. Then: "I'm going out."

Many voices at once on the intercom. "That's not wise, I don't think," said one. Granowicz? Another said, "Watch it, Jim. Careful." Sanderpay, maybe. And Sheridan, unmistakable, "Don't! You'll let them in."

Delvecchio ignored them all. He hit the switch to open the outer port doors, and slid down into the driver's seat in the mud-tractor. The doors parted. Rain washed into the chamber.

The tractor moved forward, rattling over the entry ramp and sliding

smoothly into the slime. Now he was out in the storm, and the rain ringled through his skinthins. He drove with one hand and held the laser with the other.

He stopped the tractor just outside the port, and stood up. "Come out," he screamed, as loud as he could, outshouting the thunder. "Let us see you. If you can understand me—if the fungus doesn't have you—come out now."

He paused, and hoped, and waited a long minute. He was about to shout again when a man came running from the undergrowth.

Delvecchio had a fleeting glimpse of tattered, torn clothes, bare feet stumbling in the mud, rain-drenched dark hair. But he wasn't looking at those. He was looking at the fungus that all but covered the man's face, and trailed across his chest and back.

The man—the thing—raised a fist and released a rock. It missed. He kept running, and screaming. Delvecchio, numb, raised his rifle and fired. The fungus thing fell a few feet beyond the trees.

Delvecchio left the tractor where it was, and walked back to the entry port on foot. The doors were still open. He went to the intercom. "It has them," he said. Then again, "It has them. And it's hostile. So now we kill them."

There were no answers. Just a long silence, and a stifled sob, and then Andrews' slow, detached voice. "A new reading. A body of men—thirty, forty, maybe—moving from the west. In formation. A lot of metal—duralloy, I think."

"The main force," Delvecchio said. "They won't be so easy to kill. Get ready. Remember, everything at once."

He turned back into the rain, cra-

dled his rifle, walked to the ramp. Through his goggles, Delvecchio saw the shapes of men. Only a few, at first. Fanned out.

He went outside the station, to the tractor, knelt behind it. As he watched, the turret turned. A red line reached out, touched the first dim shape. It staggered. New sheets of rain washed in, obliterating the landscape. The laser licked out again. Delvecchio, very slowly, lifted his rifle to his shoulder and joined it, firing at the dim outlines seen through the goggles.

Behind him, he felt the first sounding rocket leave up the launch tube, and he briefly saw the fire of its propellant as it cleared the dome. It disappeared into the rain. Another followed it, then another, then the firings became regular.

The dim shapes were all running together; there was a large mass of men just a few yards deep in the undergrowth. Delvecchio fired into the mass, and noted where they were, and hoped Arnold remembered.

Arnold remembered. The turret laser depressed, sliced at the trunk of a nearby tree. There was the sound of wood tearing. Then the tree began to lean. Then it fell.

From what Delvecchio could see, it missed. Another idea that didn't quite work, he reflected bitterly. But he continued to fire into the forest.

Suddenly, near the edge of the perimeter, water gouted up out of the swamp in a terrific explosion, dwarfing all else. A slinker flew through the air, surprised at itself. It rained leech parts.

The first rocket.

A second later, another explosion, among the trees this time. Then more, one after another. Several very close to the enemy. Two among the

enemy. Trees began to fall. And Delvecchio thought he could hear screaming.

He began to hope. And continued to fire.

There was a whine in the sky above. Granowicz and the flyer. Delvecchio took time to glance up briefly, and watch it flit overhead, toward the trees. Other shapes were moving up there too, however, diving on the flyer. But they were slower. Granowicz made a quick pass over the perimeter, dumping bombs. The swamp shook, and the mud and water from the explosions mixed with the rain.

Now, definitely, he *could* hear screaming.

And then the answer began to come.

Red tongues and pencils of light flicked out of the dark, played against the walls, causing steam whirlpools which washed away in the rain. Then projectiles. Explosions. A dull thud rocked the station. A second. And, somewhere in the storm, someone opened up with a screecher.

The wall behind him rang with a humming blow. And there was another explosion, much bigger, overhead, against the forcefield dome. The rain vanished for an instant in a vortex of exploding gases. Wind whipped the smoke away, and the station rocked. Then the rains touched the dome again, in sheets.

More explosions. Lasers spat and hissed in the rain, back and forth, a grisly light show. Miterz was firing from the walls, Granowicz was making another pass. The rockets had stopped falling. Gone already?

The turret fired, moved, fired, moved, fired. Several explosions rocked the tower. The world was a madness of rain, of noise, of lightning,

of night.

Then the rockets began again. The swamp and nearer forest shook to the hits. The eastern corner of the station *moved* as a sounding missile landed uncomfortably close.

The turret began to fire again. Short bursts, lost in rain. Answering fire was thick. At least one screecher was shrieking regularly.

Delvecchio saw the swampbats appear suddenly around the flyer. They converged from all sides, howling, bent on death. One climbed right up into the engine, folding its wings neatly. There was a terrible explosion that lit the night to ghosts of trailing rain.

More explosions around the force dome. Lasers screamed off the dome and turret. The turret glowed red, steamed. On the south, a section of wall vanished in a tremendous explosion.

Delvecchio was still firing, regularly, automatically. But suddenly the laser went dead. Uncharged. He hesitated, rose. He turned just in time to see the hellion dive on the turret. Nothing stopped it. With a sudden chill, Delvecchio realized that the forcefield was out.

Laser rifles reached out and touched the hellion. But not the turret laser. The turret was still, silent. The hellion hit the windows with a crash, smashing through, shattering glass and plastic and duralloy struts.

Delvecchio began to move back towards the ramp and the entry port. A slinker rose as he darted by, snapped at his leg. There was a red blur of pain, fading quickly. He stumbled, rose again, moved. The leg was numb and bleeding. He used the useless laser as a crutch.

Inside, he hit the switch to shut the outer doors. Nothing happened. He

laughed suddenly. It didn't matter. Nother mattered. The station was breached, the fields were down.

The inner doors still worked. He moved through, limped through the halls, out to the yard. Around him, he could hear the generators dying.

The turret was hit again and again. It exploded and lifted, moaning. Three separate impacts hit the tower at once. The top half rained metal.

Delvecchio stopped in the yard, looking at the tower, suddenly unsure of where he was going. The word Arnold formed on his lips, but stayed there.

The generators quit completely. Lasers and missiles and swampbats steamed overhead. All was night. Lit by lightning, by explosions, by lasers.

Delvecchio retreated to a wall, and propped himself against it. The barrage continued. The ground inside the station was torn, churned, shook. Once there was a scream somewhere, as though someone was calling him in their moment of death.

He lowered himself to the ground and lay still, clutching the rifle, while more shells pounded the station. Then all was silent.

Propped up against a rubble pile, he watched helplessly as a big slinker moved towards him across the yard. It loomed large in the rain. But before it reached him it fell screaming.

There was movement behind him. He turned. A figure in skinthins waved, took up a position near one of the ruined laboratories.

Delvecchio saw shapes moving on what was left of the walls, scrambling over. He wished he had a charge in his laser.

A red pencil of light flashed by him in the rain. One of the shapes crumbled. The man behind him had fired too soon, though, and too obviously.

The other figures leveled on him. Stabs of laser fire went searing over Delvecchio's head. Answering fire came briefly, then stopped.

Slowly, slowly, Delvecchio dragged himself through the mud, towards the labs. They didn't seem to see him. After an exhausting effort, he reached the fallen figure in skinthins. Sanderpay, dead.

Delvecchio took the laser. There were five men ahead of him, more in the darkness beyond. Lying on his stomach, Delvecchio fired at one man, then another and another. Steam geysers rose around him as the shapes in duralloy fired back. He fired and fired and fired until all those around him were down. Then he picked himself up, and tried to run.

The heel was shot off his boot, and warmth flooded his foot. He turned and fired, moved on, past the wrecked tower and the labs.

Laser stabs peeled overhead. Four, five, maybe six of them. Delvecchio dropped behind what had been a lab wall. He fired around the wall, saw one shape fall. He fired again. Then the rifle died on him.

Lasers tore into the wall, burning in, almost through. The men fanned. There was no hope.

Then the night exploded into fire and noise. A body, twisted flat, spun by. A stab of laser fire came on the teeth of the explosion, from behind Delvecchio.

Sheridan stood over him, firing into the men caught in the open, burning them down one by one. He quit firing for an instant, lobbed a vial of explosive, then went back to the laser. He was hit by a chunk of flying rubble, went down.

Delvecchio came back up as he did. They stood unsteadily, Sheridan wheeling and looking for targets. But

there were no more targets. Sheridan was coughing from exertion inside his skinthins.

The rain lessened. The pain increased.

They picked their way through the rubble. They passed many twisted bodies in duralloy, a few in skinthins. Sheridan paused at one of the armored bodies, turned it over. The faceplate had been burned away with part of the face. He kicked it back over.

Delvecchio tried another. He lifted the helmet off, searched the nostrils, the forehead, the eyes, the ears. Nothing.

Sheridan had moved away, and was standing over a body in skinthins, half covered by rubble. He stood there for a long time. "Delvecchio," he called, finally. "*Delvecchio!*"

Delvecchio walked to him, bent, pulled off the filtermask.

The man was still alive. He opened his eyes. "Oh, God, Jim," he said. "Why? Oh, *why?*"

Delvecchio didn't say anything. He stood stock still, and stared down.

Bill Reyn stared back up.

"I got through, Jim," said Reyn, coughing blood. "Once the flyer was down . . . no trouble . . . close, I walked it. They . . . they were still inside, mostly, with the heat. Only a few had . . . gone out."

Delvecchio coughed once, quietly.

"I got through . . . the vaccine . . . most, anyway. A few had gone out, infected . . . no hope. But . . . but we took away their armor and their weapons. No harm that way . . . we had to fight our way through. Me it left alone . . . but God, those guys in duralloy . . . lost some men . . . leeches, slinkers . . ."

Sheridan turned and dropped his rifle. He began to run towards the
(cont. on page 69)

R. Faraday Nelson was better known ten years ago as Ray Nelson, the controversial author of a number of remarkable stories in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, and a collaborator with Philip K. Dick. After several years away from the field he returned with "The City of the Crocodile" and "A Song On The Rising Wind" in our sister magazine, FANTASTIC STORIES (March and November, 1974). Now he makes his first appearance in this magazine with a story about a man who becomes obsessed with the question—and its answer—

WHO'S THE RED QUEEN?

R. FARADAY NELSON

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

"LOBOTOMY!"

Prim little Nurse Wilson, standing in line in the bright white hospital cafeteria, pronounced the word with a certain satisfaction.

"For who?" Eddie the Orderly asked, looming over her.

"The Red Queen."

"You're putting me on!" His reaction was so violent it startled her. *Easy there*, he told himself silently.

"Would I lie, Eddie? I heard it from Dr. Heinroth. He's her doctor. And the rest of the staff agrees it'll make her more accessible to treatment. I know lobotomy has been out of fashion for a while, but now it's making a comeback."

Eddie paid the cashier and they carried their trays to a nearby table.

"What right have they. . .?" began Eddie.

"What right have you? It's not our decision to make."

"I don't believe in lobotomy." He had seated himself, but instead of

digging in with his usual gusto, he frowned down into his food like an offended young gorilla.

"You say you don't believe in drugs either, but still it's you that administers them to the patients in your ward when you're on duty. They seem to trust you, the poor things, almost as if you were one of them." She settled into her chair with an arch smile.

Eddie was universally regarded as stupid—he had indeed never finished high school—but he understood what she meant by this little dig. He had graduated to the job of orderly from an even lower rank in the institutional pecking order.

He had once been one of the patients.

"Do your duty, Eddie." She was talking with her mouth full. "Our's not to reason why, you know."

But he was thinking, *I won't let them.*

Lobotomy was wrong in itself, but in the case of the Red Queen it was

out of the question. The Red Queen was special, not like the others. He had spent a great deal of time with her, and knew every detail of her history, though there was not a great deal to know.

The Red Queen had been found in the hills near Berkeley four years ago, wandering naked through the night and weeping. Neither the police nor, later, the doctors had been able to understand a word of the so-called "language" she spoke; she, in turn, seemed unable to understand English, Spanish or any other of the many languages that had been tried on her. All efforts to learn her identity had failed, and she had been diagnosed as a schizophrenic. (When in doubt, diagnose schizophrenia, as Dr. Heinroth always said.) During the reorganization of the state hospital system most of the other patients had been taken away, but the Red Queen remained, partly because she was an "interesting case", but mainly because she had absolutely no place else to go.

Eddie looked across the table at Nurse Wilson, who was still talking though Eddie had ceased to pay attention. For an instant he was seized by the temptation to tell all, but stopped himself in the nick of time.

He had a theory about the Red Queen, but up to now he had managed to keep it to himself.

He thought she came from outer space.

"Ssh." Finger to lips, Eddie entered the dimly lit ward.

Most of the beds were empty, but those few inmates in the room were sound asleep. Eddie had given them pills to make sure of that. . . except for the Red Queen.

The Red Queen, clad in a shapeless



white hospital shift, rolled over, sat up in bed and looked at him with those amazing dark orange eyes of hers, eyes no longer glazed and opaque with drugs as they had been for so long, but alert and curious. Eddie had not given her "the usual medication" for days. Both he and the staff on the other shifts had been giving her harmless placebos, though only Eddie knew of the substitution he'd made in her corner of the medicine cabinet, the corner that had contained the special tranquilizers her odd metabolism had seemed to require.

Seeing her, Eddie hesitated.

She looked in the dim light even stranger than usual. She was so tall for a woman. . . a good six foot three, and her short hair was of such an unusual texture—more like an animal's pelt than a human's hair—so dark and smooth and straight. But the strangest thing about her appearance was the color of her skin; it was red, not ruddy brown like the skin of an Indian, but really red, as if she had a permanent sunburn.

But, thought Eddie, what's wrong with that? Everybody probably looks like that. . . where she comes from.

He advanced to her bedside, took her hand, and gestured toward the door. She frowned, puzzled, but got out of bed.

He gave her a nurse's uniform, then looked away as she dressed. He knew it would be a tight fit, but he'd found none larger.

Fifteen minutes later Eddie and the Red Queen were in his battered old Ford, cruising down the moonlit freeway toward Berkeley.

THE RED QUEEN was well-named.

As she sat on Eddie's bed, brushing her short purplish-black hair in the

sunlight from the window, she looked every inch a queen, and she certainly was red. Was it her royal bearing that had kept him sleeping on the couch during the two weeks they'd been living here in this cramped apartment? (There were two rooms: the bedroom-livingroom and a kitchen. . . the toilet was down the hall.) Or was it her strangeness? She was beautiful, but not in a human way, hence not in a sexual way, even, as now, in the nude.

It was as if—Eddie groped for the right simile—she were a wonderful thoroughbred racehorse.

She put down the hairbrush, got up, went to the closet, and wiggled into one of the gaudy second-hand dresses Eddie had bought for her from the St. Vincent DePaul.

"Teal?" he said to her.

She turned to face him with a questioning expression. Yes, Teal was her name. He had learned her name, succeeding where all the doctors had failed. He grinned, pleased with himself.

"Teal, what you doing?"

She answered him in her own language. The only word he could understand was his own name, which she pronounced "Eeeda."

She went into the kitchen, heading for the back door. He followed her.

"Teal, you can't go out."

She had started to push open the screen door, smiling. He laid a restraining hand on her shoulder. The smile faded. She gazed for a moment longingly out at the sunlit backyard beyond the porch, then reluctantly allowed him to lead her back.

They sat down at the kitchen table.

He took her hands in his.

"Teal, you got to understand. You can't go noplac. The cops—the police—they're looking for us. It's bad

enough I got to go out for food, but you. . . they'd spot you in a minute, the way you look, the way you act, the way you can't talk. You're no ordinary Berkeley hippie. I mean, even here, where people are all kind of strange anyway, you'd stick out."

He could tell from her blank expression he wasn't getting through. He sighed, then brightened.

"Now Teal, I want to show you something I bought last time I was out."

He opened a large brown paper bag that stood on the table near his elbow.

"Look here, Teal."

It was a kind of scroll. He unrolled it, revealing a map of the Solar System.

"Earth," he said, pointing on the map. He pointed to himself. "Me, Eddie. Eddie from Earth. Where you from?" He pointed to her.

Without hesitation she indicated the planet Earth on the chart.

"No, no, Teal. Me from Earth! You from. . . who knows?" He shrugged. "Mars?" He pointed to Mars. She watched, not moving. "Venus? Saturn? The Moon?" She remained silent, her dark orange eyes following his moving forefinger. He couldn't conceal his disappointment. "Where, then?"

Again she pointed to Earth.

He thought a moment. Maybe she came from some other Solar System, from a planet a lot like Earth, maybe the same distance from some other sun.

Excitedly he gestured skyward. "Some other sun! That's it, isn't it, Teal?"

She was excited too, and, gesturing skyward, began speaking delightedly in her own language.

He turned over the map. On the

back were two starcharts, one for the northern hemisphere and one for the southern. "Where, Teal? Here?" He pointed to the Big Dipper. "Here? Here?" The Great Bear. The Little Dipper.

He looked up, saw her eyes were filled with hopelessness.

"There, there, Teal baby." He patted her hands with his big meaty paw. "You'll get it right sooner or later."

But in his mind was the thought, *Maybe she really is crazy.*

EDDIE'S MONEY had run out.

He didn't like to beg, but he begged. A lot of people begged in Berkeley, along Telegraph Avenue.

He didn't like to steal, but he stole. A lot of people stole in Berkeley. They seemed to regard theft as a kind of political protest.

Bad as he felt every time he slipped a can or two into the pockets of his overcoat in some supermarket, he felt worse when he happened to see a policeman or even a passing police car.

He'd break into a sweat every time, thinking, *If they pick me up, what'll happen to her?*

Jail was bad, but not as bad as lobotomy.

The rent was overdue and he hadn't the foggiest notion how he was going to pay it. Sooner or later he'd be evicted. He knew that, but could do nothing about it.

He couldn't look for a job, couldn't put in for welfare. Anything like that was sure to bring his whereabouts to the attention of the police. He couldn't seek help from old friends, couldn't make new ones. What if someone saw Teal and started asking questions? Which story would he tell them? That he'd helped a madwoman

to escape from an insane asylum? Or that she was a creature from outer space?

No, he had to go it alone somehow.

There was a danger in even going out of the apartment to steal or beg. What if she wasn't there when he got back? He'd gotten into the habit of locking her in, but she was clever. Someday, when she was ready, she'd find a way to break out.

And the police would catch her.

And the doctors would go to work on her.

THE BREAKTHROUGH came one morning at dawn, after a whole night of patient working with her, he on one side of the kitchen table and she on the other.

He had his face buried in his hands, feeling it was hopeless, that he'd never get through to her, when quite suddenly she'd broken the silence with the words, "Eddie. You want eat?"

"What? What did you say?"

"You want eat?" She pointed to his mouth.

"Yes! Yes! Eat! You and me! We eat!"

She fixed breakfast and he ate it, eggs with cheese spiced in that odd way she spiced everything, as if salty, not sour, was the opposite of sweet.

From then on he hated to leave her even for an hour. There were so many words in the English language, but now she could learn at least all of them he knew.

One evening, when he was finally certain she could understand his question, he asked her, "Where you from, Teal?"

She looked at him a long time. Didn't she understand? He leaned across the kitchen table and grasped her wrist in his powerful fingers.

"Teal, you're not from here, are you? You're not from this planet?"

She didn't answer. There was a worried frown on her face.

"Tell me, dammit, Teal! You're from the stars! Isn't that true?"

"Yes." Her voice was very low.

He let go her wrist and sat back, grinning. "I knew it! I knew it the minute I saw that beautiful red skin of yours." He began to laugh raggedly.

She sat rubbing her wrist, regarding him seriously.

HE SOLD the Ford, even though he was deathly afraid it would lead the police to him, and paid the back rent, with a little left over. He seemed to be able to think now, to find a way out.

The winter rains came.

Eddie bundled Teal up in raincoat, gloves, boots, rainhat and pants, so that hardly more than a few inches of red skin showed, then concealed her orange eyes behind dark glasses. Lots of people in Berkeley wore dark glasses when it was overcast, or even at night, for that matter.

They went for a walk, arm in arm.

Telegraph Avenue was one of those rare places where people are allowed to sit crosslegged on the sidewalk and sell things, things made of wood, leather, cloth, beads and metal. The rain had stopped, though the cold wind hadn't, and the street merchants were out in force.

As they strolled along, Teal said, "These people make things?"

"That's right, babe."

"They get money for them?"

"Right again."

"Money. Money gets food?"

He chuckled. "You catch on fast to how we do things down here."

"So we need money?"

"We need money."

"I can make things. You can sit here. You can get money for them." She had grown quite excited.

He didn't like the idea at first. He wouldn't be with her so much, and there would be more risk from the police. He'd probably have to go to the police station to get a vendor's license. But what else could he do? He gave in.

He bought her the raw materials and as soon as they got home, she started making jewelry.

THE JEWELRY sold well; she was quick-fingered and skillful, and her designs were unique. When the weather was good, Eddie sat out on the sidewalk and sold things to tourists; when the weather was bad he sat at home and watched Teal work at the kitchen table.

One day, about a month later, he had been sitting listening to the rain all afternoon, and as evening came on, said, "Teal, tell me about the stars."

"I do not speak right."

"Sure you do. You talk good now. I can understand every word. So start with the close stars and work out."

Frowning, she began. "The closet star. That is not one star. It is three." She held up three fingers.

"Three stars? He was delighted. "And around those three stars, how many planets?"

"No planets."

"No planets? Come on now!"

"One star can have planets. Three stars together. No planets." She went on bending wire into tiny graceful shapes.

"But there must be planets out there somewhere."

"Yes. Many. When there is one star by itself and the star is not too big and not too small and not too hot and

not too cold, then there is planets."

Eddie leaned forward. "And on these planets. . . what kind of people are there?"

"No people."

"Well, what kind of animals?"

"No animals."

"There's got to be some kind of life!" He was indignant.

"No life. No life anywhere." She sounded sad but somewhat impersonal.

He jumped to his feet and bel-lowed, "Don't lie to me, Teal! There must be life out there! There must at least be life where you came from!"

She looked at him, round-eyed with surprise at his sudden violence. "Yes. Where I come from. Yes, there is life."

He sat down, calmer now. "Tell me about it."

"My planet green and perfect. My planet a good place."

"Go on!"

"On my planet there is enough for all."

"Yes?"

"There is no money."

"Never did like the damn stuff."

"People not wear clothes."

"That explains why you were naked when you first got here."

"There is one king for the whole planet. You understand? There is peace."

Eddie leaned back with a sigh. "I kind of thought it would be like that. Maybe. . ." He hesitated. "Maybe when you go back, you can take me with you."

She looked at him blankly.

"I know you got to go home some-day," he said gently.

She burst into tears and ran into the bedroom.

He stared after her, astonished.

THE WINTER RAINS were over. The sunny days began.

Teal sat with Eddie on the sidewalk, selling things to passersby. She wore a long-sleeved blouse, pants, boots, sunglasses and a big floppy hat. Nobody seemed to think there was anything strange about her, but Eddie didn't like it when anyone looked at her too long.

Eddie had grown a long brown beard and long brown hair. In his T-shirt, jeans and sandals he looked exactly like a hundred other shaggy street people, fitting in so perfectly in the world of Telegraph Avenue that he was almost invisible.

"How long does it take to get to your home?" he asked her. He was always asking her things like that.

"No time at all," she answered patiently.

"Come on. The truth now."

"To come from another star, that takes a long long time, but on the ship it seems like a very short time. From here to nearest star, that takes a few days, maybe a week." She shrugged. "Or anyway *seems* like a few days. But in those few days, many years pass."

"When you go home. . ." He stopped, seeing in her face the sudden grimace of anguish that appeared there whenever he mentioned her going home. What did that mean? He was baffled for an instant, as he always was, but this time an idea came to him.

"You can't go home, can you, Teal?" His voice was soft.

"No." She did not meet his gaze.

"How come? Your spaceship wrecked?"

"No. My ship is here, under a lake."

He glanced at her with surprise. "But if your ship is okay. . ."

"It is my world that is wrecked," she whispered.

He felt embarrassed, tactless, but he had to ask her, "Then your mother, your father. . .?"

"They are dead. Of all my people, there is now only me alive."

"I'm sorry."

She touched his arm. "I knew it would happen. I accepted it. I am what you call a . . . a soldier. I was sent out to learn a thing and come back and report. And I have done it. I have done what I was told to do." She smiled wistfully. "I learned there was no life in the stars, and now I report."

"To who?" Like most of what she said this sounded to Eddie like some kind of riddle.

"To you, Eddie."

She laughed, but it was a bitter laugh, with an undertone of pain.

TEAL WAS learning how to read and write.

One afternoon, as they were walking home from the public library down one of Berkeley's quiet tree-lined streets, a policecar pulled up alongside them, and Eddie and Teal were arrested.

The charge, to their surprise, was possession of marijuana, though they were probably the only two people on Telegraph Avenue who had never possessed marijuana.

At the police station, when no marijuana could be found on their persons, they were almost released, but before they could leave someone thought to check their fingerprints, and they were identified as the mad-woman and hospital orderly who had disappeared the previous year.

Not exactly under arrest, yet not exactly free either, they were transported in a squad car to a nearby

hospital and escorted into the office of one of the resident psychiatric social workers.

They're going to take her back, Eddie thought. *They're going to give her a lobotomy after all.*

The social worker, obviously in a hurry, glanced at his wristwatch before shaking hands with Eddie. "You can call me Mike," said the balding, nervous little man. "Now if you'll be seated, young lady."

Teal sat down in a chrome and plastic chair across the desk from him.

"And you too, young man."

Eddie sat in another chair beside her.

The chairs, like everything else in the room, were modern and strictly functional.

"You were diagnosed as a schizophrenic, miss?"

"I suppose so," she answered.

"I talked to your doctor—Dr. Heinrich wasn't it?—by phone. He said that before your escape you didn't communicate with people, that you couldn't even talk. Yet it seems to me you're communicating well enough now."

"I'm perfectly all right," she said calmly. "There's nothing wrong with me."

"Yes. So I see. A spontaneous recovery. Schizophrenics do that sometimes. There are those within the profession who would say—off the record of course—that that's the only way a schizophrenic ever does recover. I'll be happy to inform your doctor of that. Now you, miss, can wait outside. I'd like to have a word with your friend here."

As Teal got up and left, Eddie said numbly, "Just like that? Not even any tests?"

Mike chuckled. "She can walk and talk. She has managed to keep out of

trouble for a year. The way things are these days, with budget cuts and all, that's more than enough to keep you out of an institution."

Teal had closed the door behind her.

Mike's expression hardened. "But you, young man, could be subject to legal penalties if someone chose to bring charges."

"Is anyone bringing charges?" Eddie demanded sharply.

"No. No, I don't think so. Still, to clear matters up I'd like to ask you a few questions. It's to your best interests to answer them, young man, and answer them truthfully." Again his manner changed abruptly and smiling, he added, "You don't mind, do you?"

"No," Eddie said uncertainly. "I guess not."

Mike sat back in his swivel chair, making a little temple with his fingers. "Sometimes a schizophrenic makes a sudden recovery, it's true, but at other times the schizoid personality simply switches from one mode to another. A hebephrenic—someone completely withdrawn from the world—can turn into a paranoid, and a paranoid, though outwardly more normal, is also more dangerous. Delusions of grandeur and delusions of persecution is the usual pattern, and such a person can become dangerously violent either to assert the supposed superiority or to combat the supposed persecution." He leaned forward. "You've been living with the young lady, I gather, since her escape."

"That's right."

"Has she ever told you anything—shall we say—cosmic?"

"Cosmic?" Eddie wondered if the social worker could somehow tell what someone was thinking by body

language or some other superscientific magic.

"Yes," Mike went on. "Has she claimed to be a goddess, for example."

"No, not a goddess."

"An angel? A demon? A creature from another planet?"

Eddie hesitated before answering, "No, nothing like that."

The social worker relaxed. "Excellent. Then all's well. If she does start in on such things however. . ."

"I'll let you know."

"I'd rather you'd look up someone else. We're kind of understaffed here. . ."

Eddie left the office in a daze.

"What did he say?" asked Teal, jumping up from the couch in the waiting room.

"Nothing important," muttered Eddie.

EDDIE, in his pajamas, sat on his couch and watched Teal undress.

"Teal, can I ask a question?"

"Of course."

"On your planet, do men and women make love?"

"Why yes, of course." Her orange eyes turned toward him, studying him.

"I mean, do you do it the same way we do it?"

"How do you do it?" she asked innocently.

Unsteadily Eddie stood up and walked over to her, painfully aware of her nakedness, which up until now he had almost ceased to notice.

"Like this." He took her in his arms and kissed her. A moment later he pulled back and looked at her almost angrily.

"What's wrong, Eddie?"

"I don't know. That kiss was so. . . so ordinary somehow."

She laughed. "What did you expect?"

He did not answer out loud, but thought, *Something out of this world.*

A little after midnight, Teal and Eddie made love for the first time. It all went off perfectly naturally, too naturally.

At two A. M., sitting up in bed beside her sleeping satisfied womanly body, he finally decided she wasn't from outer space after all. He felt like shaking her awake and shouting, "So you really are crazy!", but the habit of awe was not yet completely broken.

It was the following morning when he at last nerved himself to confront her, across the breakfast table.

"You're not really from outer space, are you?" He sat, arms folded on his broad chest, head cocked to one side, a faint superior smile on his lips.

She turned away from the stove, and when she saw his face she gathered her bathrobe around her, though it was rather warm in the room, then said, softly but firmly, "No, I'm not."

"Then why did you say you were?"

"It seemed so important to you to believe it."

"To me?" Eddie was dumbfounded.

"I was afraid you'd. . ." Unconsciously she rubbed her wrist. ". . .you'd hurt me, if I didn't go along with the outer space thing."

He thought, *How clearly she talks now!*

"I'd never hurt you. Teal. You must of had delusions of persecution."

Her words came in a rush. "Don't turn me in, Eddie. I'm perfectly normal now. Promise you won't turn me in."

"Of course I won't. Don't be silly. I can see you're okay, just like everybody else." And he thought, but did not say, *Ordinary.*

Before he left the apartment, she tried to kiss him, but he wouldn't let her.

He had a good day on Telegraph Avenue. "I cured a girl of schizophrenia," he told himself smugly. "And I did it when all medical science had given up on her."

Around noon he met a very young, quite pretty girl.

He'd heard a husky voice saying, "Any spare change, mister?" and when he'd looked up from the jewelry he had spread out on a blanket on the sidewalk, there she'd been.

He didn't give her any spare change, but they fell into conversation and soon she was telling him that she'd run away from home, that her name was Isis Flower, and that she was hooked on speed.

"I can cure you," Eddie said.

"Nobody can cure me, man. I've tried to kick, but it's no use."

"Leave it to Doctor Eddie!"

After a while he and Isis Flower went to a little room where she was, as she put it, "crashing".

"I don't actually live here," she explained, undressing.

EDDIE AWOKE to find darkness and fog outside the window and Isis Flower gone, along with all the money he'd had in his wallet, though she had not, so far as he could tell, taken any of his jewelry from the battered old suitcase where he carried it.

After getting dressed he looked listlessly around the room.

There were things there, but they were all men's things.

Eddie left quickly.

Out in the street, under a fog-haloed streetlight, he paused and set down his suitcase.

"Women!" he muttered. "Sooner or later they always rip you off."

But then an odd thought struck him. Teal could have done the same thing to him that Isis Flower did. She could have, but she hadn't.

He said to himself, "Hey, Teal don't have to stay with me now. She can talk. She can support herself with her jewelry. She's even learning to read and write. So why does she stay? Why don't she rob me and run? Every other female I've ever known, one way or another, sooner or later, has robbed me and run!"

Maybe, after all, there *was* something special about the Red Queen.

EDDIE burst into the apartment shouting delightedly, "Teal! Teal! I'm home!"

There was no answer.

Her note was on the kitchen table:

Eddie,

It was good that we tawked. I understand now that what I am is not what you want. My work on Earth is done.

Goodby,

Teal.

The first thing he realized was that there were only a few words spelled wrong, and he felt a momentary flush of pride in himself as a teacher, and Teal as a student.

Then another thought came to him. This was a suicide note.

"Crazy bitch," he whispered, throwing himself down in his usual chair at the kitchen table.

A phrase floated through his mind. It was something Teal had said. "My ship is here, under a lake."

A picture came along with the phrase.

In the picture Teal was standing on the edge of a lake, taking off her clothes. She was going to dive into the water; she was going to drown herself.

That was where Teal had gone. Eddie was sure of it, the same as he'd been sure she was from outer space, but this time it was no nutty fantasy built for two. That crazy lady could really do it!

He ran into the bedroom, jerked out a map of the San Francisco Bay Area he kept in his bureau drawer.

A lake! A lake!

There were a lot of lakes on the map.

But it had to be a lake you could get to from the Berkeley hills with no clothes on. That's where she'd been found.

And it had to be a lake deep enough to hide a spaceship. There was no spaceship there, of course, but Teal would believe there was!

Only one lake filled the bill.

The San Pablo Reservoir!

He left the apartment without bothering to close the door behind him and ran out into the fog.

Dashing along the street, he glanced into each parked car he passed. Ah, at last! Some fool had left the keys in the ignition. Eddie jumped in, started the car, and pulled away from the curb with a squeal of tires.

HE'D GONE through the tunnel, gas pedal to the floor, and was now in open country on the long downgrade on the other side of the coastal range. The fog was gone; the stars shone hard and clear this side of the hills and there were very few other cars on the freeway.

Then he heard the wail of a police siren behind him and saw, in his rearview mirror, a flashing red light.

It was only then he began to have doubts.

Maybe Teal wasn't going to make a suicide attempt.

Maybe Teal would be back tomorrow morning, pleading to be forgiven.

Maybe Teal wasn't crazy, or at least not as crazy as she had been.

Maybe Teal, if she was going to kill herself, would do it somewhere else, in some other way.

But he didn't slow down, just zoomed down the offramp and, tires screaming, slowed through a sharp left turn and careened onward along the narrow winding San Pablo Dam Road toward the reservoir.

The policecar lost ground, not daring to drive as fast as Eddie along such dangerous curves, but even when he couldn't see them, Eddie could hear them back there somewhere, with their infernal wailing siren.

At the crest of a hill Eddie saw, far ahead of him, another red flashing light coming from the other direction. He was caught! He knew there were no turnoffs in this section.

He slammed on the brakes and, as the car screeched to a stop in a cloud of dust, he sprang out and sprinted for the woods. As he passed the first dark looming mass of pines, he heard the policecars wail to a halt on the highway. When they shouted something at him with their bullhorn, he paid no attention, just kept running.

When he paused for breath and looked back, he could see flashlights moving in the gloom, coming closer, could hear gruff voices issuing commands, complaining, swearing.

He went on, panting, dizzy.

And suddenly burst out of the pine grove to see, at the foot of the hill ahead, the flat dark expanse of the reservoir. He fell, staggered to his feet, kept on running down the steep slope.

Then he saw her.

She had dropped her clothes and

was walking slowly, like the queen she had always seemed to be, toward the water's edge.

"Teal!" Eddie shouted.

She glanced back, saw him.

Then dove gracefully into the black water.

Eddie was tearing off his clothes as he ran. He had only to pause a moment to rip off his pants and shoes, then he dove in after her.

The water was cold and good; it refreshed him.

Would he have the strength to drag Teal out when he caught up with her? She was a tall woman but. . . yes, he could handle her.

But he had not realized it would be so dark in the reservoir. He could hardly tell which way was up, let alone see where Teal had gone.

He thought, *Hey, I could drown, too!*

But then he heard a deep humming sound, like the bass pipe of a church organ that echoed and re-echoed in some impossible immense cathedral. And there, below him, was a dull yellowish glow.

He swam deeper.

There was something there, something huge but long and thin and streamlined, something with windows brightly lit. In its top there was an opening.

But his lungs were bursting.

He clawed his way to the surface, sucked in air in great desperate gulps, caught a glimpse of the flashlights of the police moving along the shore, then dove again.

The opening was smaller now.

Like the iris in a camera, it was closing.

With a last violent effort, he passed through and found himself in the airlock of the starship.

THE EARTH was rapidly shrinking.

Eddie watched through a window that stretched from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall.

"Where are we going?" he asked. "To your home planet?"

Teal turned from the maze of glowing colored lights on the control panel and looked at him through the semi-darkness of the large oblong room. "Earth is my home planet, Eddie. We are going on a little trip, you and I. I want you to see some of the things I've seen. Since you insist on sharing my mission, you must also share my knowledge."

The sound in the room grew softer, a gentle hum now instead of a drone.

"But. . ." He faltered. "When will we come back?"

She pushed off and came drifting toward him, almost as if she were still under water, her naked red body glowing in the light from the control panels and the stars outside.

"It will be only a few months from now, as time flows within the starship," she said. "But when we return to Earth, your nation, the United States of America, will be as lost and forgotten a legend as my homeland, the place you call Atlantis."

As the starship accelerated steadily toward the speed of light, behind them the Sun, the planets, and all the stars gradually turned a sullen and glowering red, then faded out into blackness.

—R. FARADAY NELSON

STONE CIRCLE

LISA TUTTLE

Readers who have been with us over the past six or so years may remember Lisa Tuttle as an occasional contributor to our letters column in years gone by. In recent times she has sold stories to a variety of magazines and anthologies; her first professionally published story was in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction. This story marks her first (but not her last) appearance here. It is, she says, "a story I'm very fond of, but I've been very uncertain about marketing because I'm afraid it's just barely science fiction. . ." I'll leave pigeonholing and categories for others to worry about; this is a powerful and realistic story about a woman's life in times to come.

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

I OBSERVE MYSELF, woman of stone, lying on the floor. (Beneath me, a technicality, is the sheet; beneath that the mattress; beneath *that* the floor) I observe myself, nude, a study in stone. Evening sun slants through the open window and stripes but cannot warm one marble leg. There is a screen on the window; there are screens on all the windows which may not be removed. Outside it is winter, late February, and there is snow on the ground.

Above me I hear him zip, I know he is smiling, masculine, buckling his belt, congratulating himself—I do not move. I see myself, a natural wonder, formed in rock by the silent song of water, this miraculous life-sized reclining woman observed by schoolchildren and touched by tourists.

I see him walk past me, an atheist with doubts, embarrassed to be caught looking at *la dama de piedra* lest his curiosity be taken for piety.

He leaves me without another look and the door clicks closed behind

him. I lie still, the only observer of myself. The art students have taken their sketch pads and gone home for the night, the curiosity seekers are grumbling and plodding toward rest. The sun is down, the rays gone, and my stone body grows cold with the night.

THAT MORNING my government inspector brought me meat in a plastic bag, as he did every week. He told me it was rabbit, confiscated in a raid, although I didn't ask. I didn't care what it was, only that it was fresh, and meat. I put the bag on the window-ledge.

I turned back and saw that his pants were already down. Something—the gaps in my bathrobe?—had excited him, for he had an erection already, without my touch. I dropped to my knees and gave him the thanks he had come for.

A few minutes; it was over; he was gone. I spit into the wastebasket and put a piece of gum in my mouth. I

thought about a refrigerator. I didn't think I knew anyone who could get me one, and just the thought of making new contacts, making those unspoken bargains with my body, wore me out. I was well-off as I was.

My stomach was growling for breakfast, so I opened the bag and found that the bastard had fouled me. I resolved not to be so trusting in the future: government men are sharper than they look. The meat was there, all right, but it was raw. I had no stove of course and part of the (unspoken) deal was that the meat would be cooked. Bastard. Thinking about eating it raw made me wonder, a little queasily, if that redness had once been rabbit, test-monkey, or human baby. I put it back in the window and took my meal card downstairs. The powdered milk was gone—I was lucky to get a packet of dry cereal.

The building manager came in the afternoon. He thought he was wooing me; thought every sweaty inch he gained on my thigh a major victory. When I couldn't take anymore of his heavy breath in my face, his demands for sympathy and his clammy claim on my leg. I told him a story about the meat.

A friend worked in a lab, sweeping up, I said. She found the monkey dead, and got first claim after it was disinfected. She gave me half of it—a favor repaid. The only problem, I said, was that the meat was raw, and I had no stove. . .

But he had one! Of course! And he was still so anxious to keep in what he thought were my good graces that he took only a nibble of the meat. His anxiety was laughable; he thought he was weaving a cautious and difficult path to my bed. If he had been a little smarter and checked me out he would have known I had no right to



the room I had, nor to any room in this building, nor to any politeness from him.

We watched television after we ate in his apartment. I think his intention was to seduce me while I was enraptured by the banalities on screen; whatever his plan, he fell heavily and bolt-upright, asleep. There was a roach on the arm of his chair. As I watched, it moved into new territory: his arm. I thought he must wake as it slowly moved up toward his shoulder, but he snored heavily on. The gusts of air from his nostrils must have deterred the roach from attempting his face, for it turned and went down his arm again.

I got up and quietly left.

IT HAPPENED on the street, in one of the sections completely untouched by reconstruction. A lot of the so-called "young revolutionaries" lived in that section, seldom awake enough to notice the crumbling buildings they slept in, unaware of the broken, boarded windows, the burned-out ruins, the rats and cockroaches.

I don't remember what had brought me there—to seek out a contact, perhaps, to find out where the best illegal trades were to be made. I certainly had no friends in that section.

There were the usual drably-dressed people picking their ways between muddy rivulets of melting snow and piles of crusty snow and garbage. There was a young girl, just another of the moon-faced young revolutionaries, but for one thing:

I saved her life.

The silly bitch was walking in a daze, off the curb, into the street where the cars, tanklike beasts, plowed relentlessly through huge puddles of muddy slush. I leaped at her, my body slamming into hers, my

arms by reflex wrapping around her, and we rolled into the puddled gutter.

I was up, dripping, in seconds—still fast, although my street-fighting reflexes had been sleeping for two years—and pulled her with me back onto the curb.

I slapped her, I was that angry, and cursed her without invention.

"Where's your mother?" I asked her. "Are you tripping, silly fool? Or born that way?"

She shook her head. "Nothing," she said plaintively, and began to cry.

I watched her shake and sob. Anyone would know her for a young revolutionary—her dirty, heavy clothes, her pallor, her whole air of being disconnected with this world. She was very blonde and her hair hung long and tangled, probably unbrushed for weeks.

She stopped crying but continued to shake—she was on Chill. Probably her first time, I thought, if she was silly enough to roam the streets. I looked around, but her friends were gone. Our street corner was deserted except for us, now; at the sight of something that might be violence everyone on the street had retreated to a nearby hole. I didn't doubt that there were eyes on us from each boarded, broken, or open window.

I didn't want to leave her standing there, shaking, alone, so I committed myself with a hand on her arm and raided my precious hoard of foodstamps to buy her a hot drink.

She clutched the warm mug to her face and drank greedily, her teeth clinking against the rim.

"Your first time on Chill?"

She was drawn up into herself like a turtle, shoulders up, bones tense, gripping the mug so that I feared it would shatter. She shook her head.

"Oh, no—I've done it lots. It was really stupid of me—I know—" she looked down, then up at me, frankly. "I just couldn't go along with them anymore, sitting around in a daze and talking about how subversive we are, and what it will be like when things change. So I asked them. 'We're no threat,' I said. 'The government likes us—we'll keep doing Chill and stay in our dreamworld. We *talk* about revolution, but—' I told them. . ." she shrugged. "They couldn't see it. I guess I shouldn't have expected them to, but it was so clear to me, and I thought that all of us on Chill together, our minds together. . ." Her eyes begged understanding.

I knew what she was saying, and I knew how she felt. Although I was grateful for it now, I knew the only reason I hadn't become a young revolutionary myself was my allergy to Chill. I kept trying, seeing each failure as a personal, humiliating weakness. Finally the Chill had made me so sick that I could stay no longer, not even to be with the only friends I knew.

"A real revolution would start somewhere else," I said, to let the girl know I understood her.

She nodded eagerly. "Yes, yes. It would be underground. But do you see this—that the best place for a real revolutionary movement to start would be among the young revolutionaries—because we're so far beyond suspicion."

I shook my head. "Chill freaks are harmless. You're clear-headed, and there may be others, but not enough. There will never be a revolution. It's been tried before. I don't believe in that stuff."

"But. . ."

"You're making things so simple," I said. "Things aren't that way. The

government isn't composed of half-wits entirely. This system won't allow any true revolutionary tendencies. Any true revolutionary would have to be an expert at hiding if he was to last more than a few days, and a group of size enough to be useful would be visible. They'd be destroyed, swept away completely. You were safer with your Chilly friends."

"I can't go back." Flat as her bone-white hands on the dirty formica table.

So I took her home with me. I didn't mean to bring her home to stay, but only until she got her bearings and decided to return to her friends. Her name was Kit, I learned, and I thought her very like a kitten, small and soft, clear-eyed and vulnerable.

We stayed up late, talking, and before I knew it I *was* talking, telling her things I'd never told anyone before, the words falling out and giving me a kind of relief. Perhaps I dropped my guard because she seemed so innocent. She told me about herself, without artifice, and although I knew from my own life that people can't live as she had been living and remain innocent—somehow I believed. She was idealistic enough to think that a revolution could, and would, succeed—a stage I had passed sometime around puberty.

"How did you get a room all to yourself?" she asked, and for once I did not give my automatic lie.

"Contacts," I said. "Blackmail and mutual favors. Pretending—it's not a very interesting story."

She did not press me. We talked of other things.

I foresaw some awkwardness and sleeplessness for us on the single mattress, but Kit, confident and vulnerable, chose to nestle close to me for warmth. I put my arms around her;

became the mother with Kit my child. She fell asleep quickly and seemed to sleep deeply. I hardly slept at all. The room was too hot—I'd closed the windows for Kit's sake—and her presence kept nudging me as I dozed so that I would wake, to look at her.

Her nearness moved me—she reminded me of my sister. We'd shared a bed long ago, before we had been separated in a riot—or perhaps they called them battles by then—when I was ten and she was seven. She was probably dead now.

I woke and slept and smiled and woke and touched her hair and slept and pulled her closer. When I awoke for the last time the room was light and I was hot. I could see a light sheen of perspiration on Kit's face; her hair was damp and her mouth hung open in sleep. I got up and went to open the window. I knew as soon as she woke, even with my back to her. The atmosphere of the room changed.

I didn't say anything. I turned from the window to the mirror, which was hung flat against the wall above my dresser, and began to brush my hair.

I heard her move, heard the covers thrown back, but didn't turn around even when I felt her approach. She stood behind me, only her head visible in the mirror. Her eyes met mine in the glass. I had thought she had grey eyes the night before, but now, washed by sleep, they were green, like reflections of the sunlit ocean.

She raised her hand slowly and laid those translucent fingers on my cheek for a moment. Her eyes never left mine. I felt something within me, a tightening in my stomach and then a slow throb, like an extra heart. I laid down the hairbrush and slowly turned until we were face to face, our eyes

meeting without glass intermediary, our lips touching, nothing at all to keep us apart.

WE QUICKLY SETTLED into a routine. She would leave early every morning and return before curfew. She had no possessions, and I was certain that we could keep her presence a secret from the manager indefinitely. I could have passed her off as a younger sister and made a deal with the manager, but I was tired of deals, agreements and placations.

Kit kept me warm at night, and that warmth began to spread into my days. I became happier in my own body; it seemed to fit me better those days than ever before. Knots that had been tied before my street-fighting days loosened.

My breasts had always been too large; I had never been happy with them. Fighting or running they were a nuisance, and it had always seemed ridiculous to me that they should stay so large when the rest of my body was thin and nearly fleshless from lack of food. But I was almost grateful for them when Kit put her hands on them, or nuzzled her face against them.

Kit came running in one day, long before evening, as I was putting on my coat to go out to the welfare office for a food card renewal. Kit had to take her meals at another cafeteria, across town, and I was trying to think of a way to get her a card for my cafeteria.

I was frightened when I saw her, but she was smiling. "I found them," she cried. "I found some—"

"What are you doing here?"

"There is an underground! There is an organization!"

"What?"

"This boy, three floors up, he's in

touch. It's moving very slowly, of course, they have to be cautious, but. . ."

She had found her real revolutionaries, or others deluded as she. Now I was frightened, this time with reason.

"You mustn't get involved with them, Kit."

"Why not? I thought you'd want to, I thought you'd be—"

"Well I'm not. I told you I didn't believe in that stuff. I don't want to be locked up or killed—this isn't a game, Kit, the government doesn't think so."

"They won't catch us. And it's worth the risk."

"Kit," I said, despairing.

She came and held me. "I have to. You knew that, didn't you? This is important—we must try to change things. You can't simply be happy because you have a warm room and some extra food—there are other things, more important."

"Name them."

"Things could be so much better—for everyone."

We froze at the sound of knocking. Kit drew away from me, slowly.

It was the building manager. His eyes slid past mine and into the room before he entered bodily. I did not bother to introduce him to Kit. I did not like the way he looked at her.

"It was nice of you to stop in," I said to Kit. The manager watched her leave. He would have left himself, I think, but I detained him.

"Your friend live in the building?" He asked.

"No," I said. "Her husband works in the area and she has lunch with him sometimes. She just stopped in."

Kit's revolutionary activities, whatever they were, went on. I did not question her, and she did not confide

in me. One night she spoke of leaving.

"But why? Rooms are hard to get—your roommate might spy on you. You're comfortable here, aren't you? We're happy, aren't we?" I must have sounded pathetic.

She moved closer to me on the mattress and stroked my hip gently. "Of course. And I would still see you. But this is dangerous for you, having me here. I might get you in trouble as well if I'm caught."

"Then stop this silly game! If you understand the danger—if you're caught, there'll be more to worry about than trouble for me. I can take care of myself. It's you—you who must be watched out for. It's you who walks into traffic."

"I was only thinking of you," she said into my ear. "I don't have to leave."

"Well, don't," I said, and pulled her roughly to me.

Later she asked if they might meet in my room, just once. I was silent. "How many?" I asked, finally.

"Only the three of us," she said. "Danny's roommate lost his job, so he's always in. We can't meet there anymore."

"You know how I feel."

"The three of us, we've thought about getting a room together. We might be able to arrange it, but it would be dangerous for the three of us, if we were all caught together." She shrugged.

"When I go out in the morning I'll leave the door unlocked," I said.

After that they used the room several times, then regularly. I was always careful never to come back early, never to see either of the others. I did not want to be able to identify them.

One morning while Kit was out a

man came to the door. He was an oily, handsome man, well-fed and well-dressed. He showed his government card and asked to come in.

He began to speak about Kit, a fact I didn't realize immediately as he used no names. He listed crimes, conspiracies and circumlocutions of the law she was guilty of, and asked me her whereabouts. I told him I didn't know what he was talking about.

He looked around the room, a false smile plastered on his face. "A bureaucratic mistake, to have assigned you so large a room. You don't have a roommate?"

"My husband and I both served—he died in government service," I said. "This was to be my—small—compensation." I let bitterness into my voice.

He looked at me, the smile gone. "You were never married, and you never served our country. I could list the things you're guilty of, never mind shielding your friend. I could have you put in a detention ward for a few months—longer than that, if you were conveniently forgotten." He looked at me then as if my clothes had suddenly vanished. "Or we could make a deal. I imagine you've made a lot of deals."

I let my eyes meet his and saw him begin to smile again, as if the deal were already made. I stood up and pulled off sweater and jeans, naked before him except for my ludicrous white socks. I didn't think he would leave me alone about Kit, but he might not make trouble about the room after this. I wasn't sure whether or not to believe in the talk about detention wards. He stood up, almost against me, his hands tucked into his belt, and pushed me slightly, toward the mattress. I lay down, my legs sprawling open. I saw the bulge in his

pants.

"Where does your friend live?"

I sat up, a little less certain, and reached for my sweater. He kicked it out of my reach. I began to be afraid Kit would walk in.

"Look, I don't even know this person," I said.

"Try again."

I stood up, very close to him. "Look, you're a nice guy. I like your looks. But this—"

He took one of my breasts in his hand and held it too tightly.

"I don't know where she lives."

He didn't move.

"Who gave you my name?" I asked. "I don't have any friends, really."

"Try to remember," he said. I felt the sharpness of his fingernails. "Think about it. I'll be back." He left, not even closing the door, so that I had to stumble off the mattress towards it.

I wondered how much he knew, and what truth there was in his threats. He had power, obviously, but his tactics were a little melodramatic—his way of speaking, his self-importance. I was probably a long-shot, but still, he would come back, and if he came back often enough he would find Kit. I dressed, absently, and left the room still thinking about the problem. Now she would have to quit her group of friends—she wouldn't want to endanger them, at least, I thought. I was so absorbed in my thoughts that I turned the wrong way in the hall, toward the stairs rather than the elevators, and almost did not notice my mistake.

They were in the stairwell, Kit and some boy, some other revolutionary. I saw them through the little window in the door, my hands frozen to the metal plate, frozen before they

pushed. I saw them bisected by the thin wires that criss-crossed through the glass. They were glued together, their heads pushing and straining as if they struggled to climb down each others' throat. The boy had one arm around her, his hand pressing against the small of her back to push her closer to him; with his other hand he frantically kneaded one of her breasts. She had one arm looped about his waist; her right hand was in his pants.

My hands slid down the door's metal plate, and I went back to the room. Awkward, alone, I stood in the center of the room and did not know what to do. I went to the mirror to brush my hair and saw that my lips were moving, saying, "Kit, Kit, Kit," in silent, hopeless prayer.

When Kit came home that evening I did not speak to her. She was troubled by my behaviour, but I would not answer her questions, nor allow her to touch me. I did not tell her about the government agent; I did not ask her questions about her day.

"I'm going out early tomorrow," I said as we lay uneasily close in the dark. "I'll be gone until curfew." I rolled over and pretended to sleep.

I waited at the end of the hall the next morning, spying on our door, making deals with myself. I saw Kit leave for the staircase, and saw her return with a boy a few minutes later. One boy. They went inside and the door clicked shut. I kept guard, making more deals with myself, angry and frightened, feeling hatred retie all the knots Kit had loosed. When the government agent came, as I had thought he might, my throat was tied in a knot and the words brutally expelled: "She's in the room. With a friend."

I walked the streets until curfew.

Kit was not there when I came home. I waited for her by the window, and then I slept alone. I woke once when, in turning over, I didn't bump into anyone. My eyes flashed open, straining against the darkness, wanting to see her face, wondering if she would come in the morning.

Morning instead brought my government inspector, perhaps with more meat. I let him knock and call my name, and finally he went away. Evening brought a different knock. I opened the door.

There he stands, oily, handsome, impeccably suited. He smiles at me. "May I come in?"

I step back. He comes in after me and looks around admiringly, as if he has never seen the room before.

"Very attractive," he says, nodding. "You're lucky to have it to yourself."

He begins to unbutton his shirt. Watching, I feel a heaviness come into my limbs. I sink down onto the mattress, my legs two broken columns. My eyelids would crush my gelid eyes, so I keep them open and watch him kick his shoes into the corner. I can't feel his hands as he undresses me, all in silence, nor can I feel his flesh against my coarse-grained skin.

He tries to arouse me, tries to warm me with his warm flesh. He strokes my marble flank with one hand, his mouth busy at my breast. My tongue is stone, too heavy to lift to tell him that it is no use: he'll get no milk from my granite teat.

I lie and let the winds and years age me, untroubled as the mountains by growing vegetation or the sweating, gasping creatures that clutch and crawl across my surface.

—LISA TUTTLE

Grant Carrington has been involved with the stage for years and it's a theme which has surfaced in his work before (as in "A Shakespearean Incident," *FANTASTIC*, October, 1975), but never with the power and perception he has brought to this story about one of the last live actors and—

HIS HOUR UPON THE STAGE

GRANT CARRINGTON

Illustrated by RICK BRYANT

STUART SAT in the pool of light, motionless. Then the tape recorder began again with the final lines of *Krapp's Last Tape*. I irised down to a pinspot on Stuart's face, held it for a second, then shuttered the spotlight out and kicked off the last dimmer.

The sound of my applause echoed in the empty theatre as I brought the stage lights up with my foot. Stuart stepped out to the edge of the apron and bowed. I brought the lights down again and pushed a large red button. The curtains began to move slowly and majestically across the stage. I backed the carbon rods in the spotlight away from each other until the arc was broken, turned off the spot, and brought the house lights up.

By this time the curtain had closed, so I turned on the work lights backstage. Then I walked out of the balcony, down the stairs to the main lobby, through the house, and backstage. There's a door off the balcony that leads directly backstage, but I enjoy the trip through the theatre.

Stuart was taking off his makeup.

"How'd it look?" he asked.

"Not too good. You're losing your

edge. I think we ought to quit doing surrealism and go back to the classics for a while."

"Fine with me. Hand me the cold cream, will you?" He started rubbing the cold cream in his face and hair, taking out the makeup and the white dye. "How about doing *Macbeth* next?"

"Sure. We haven't done Shakespeare in months."

"Or how about *Othello*?" He turned to me. "I've always loved your Iago."

"My Iago" I sat down on one of the benches. Stuart nodded. "Who'll run the lights if I do Iago? You?"

"You could teach me."

"All right. Tomorrow night. I'll be here at seven."

"I can't do it," he mumbled. "Angie's expecting company tomorrow night." Then he turned to me again, quickly, savagely. "But we don't need light changes for Shakespeare. Just put them on one setting and we can do it together again, Tim."

It was an old argument, one we'd been through thousands of times since I had retired from the stage ten years earlier.

"It wouldn't be the same, Stuart, and you know it. If we're going to do these things, we ought to do them the best way possible."

"Maybe it's time we stopped then."

I felt as if my heart was doing cartwheels like the jester in *Once Upon a Mattress*, but I managed to keep a calm exterior. "If that's the way you feel, Stuart, then certainly there's no need to keep going."

"No, that's all right," he muttered. "I want to keep going, Tim, you know that. For all we know, we may be the last actors doing live theatre in the world."

"Or in America, anyway," I said.

"But sometimes it all seems so futile." He turned to face me. "It's been so long since you've been on stage, Tim. And our days in this theatre are numbered. This is the only place Metropolitan has left that isn't being used. They'll be into it and converting it to a TV studio in a few weeks."

"That's an old rumor."

"But this time it's true, and you know it. This is your last chance to go back on the stage."

"There are other cities."

"Your last chance, Tim," he repeated quietly.

"I'll think about it," I said. We both knew I wouldn't.

I TOOK THE chair, table, and tape recorder that we had used for *Krapp's Last Tape* off the stage, and rolled the Shakespeare platforms into place. Then I went back to the light booth I had jury-rigged on the balcony and set the dimmers for *Macbeth*.

Finally I eased myself into the crawlspace above the suspended ceiling and began resetting the ante-pro's. It was tedious, reaiming and re-focusing the Leko's and Fresnels to



the tape marks on the stage, but I'd gone through it innumerable times before.

For nearly four years, after the rest of America's live theatre had stumbled to rest, Stuart and I had been putting on performances in the deserted theatre. At first we did them nightly for a dedicated little audience. As the audience drifted away, we did fewer shows. But we still tried to do at least two a week.

I don't know why we kept on: I guess we each thought it was what the other wanted. We were perhaps the last performers of legitimate theatre. When we quit, thousands of years of theatre tradition would come to an end.

"Tim, are you up there?"

I looked down at the stage. Stuart, a tiny figure in a ridiculous opera cape, was shouting up at me. I hollered back at him.

"Is there anything I can do to help you?" he asked.

"Sure. Walk down right a little, will you? To the red tape mark."

He did and I focused a Leko on his face.

"Okay, now go over to stage left. Back a little bit. Hold it right there."

I scrambled across the catwalk until I came to the Leko that was supposed to be focused on that area. After changing gels, I refocused it on Stuart and shuttered it so that the light cut off a little below his shoulders.

"Okay. Thanks, Stuart. You can go on home."

"Right. See you Friday."

He made a flying leap off the apron, over the orchestra pit, and almost tumbled into the first row of seats. One of these days, he's going to break his neck with that silly jump.

When I was finished with the ante-pros, I went back to the light

board, turned off the lights I had been working on, and set the stage lights. Then I dragged the stepladder onto the stage and began working on the first and second pipe.

I should've re-gelled the ground rows, but it was nearly midnight and I was beginning to get tired. Hell, I could do them tomorrow.

So I opened all the circuit breakers and went off to my cot in the ticket office.

THE NEXT MORNING I went to Studio L, where we were taping a new drama for Metropolitan. Paul Denesha, the boss of my light crew, gave me the cassette for my computer.

I'd like to have thrown it in a trash can. I haven't been running lights as long as Paul or most of the guys at Metropolitan, but I feel that light crews ought to do more than just punch buttons on a computer. There's no soul to it, no art, just as those clowns people watch on the box aren't actors any more, just extensions of the director and the editing room.

But the light crews are even worse. They're nothing but a bunch of featherbedders. There are three on my crew: Paul, myself, and Artie Wright, an oldtimer who'll be retiring in a few years. Five years ago there were four; in twenty or thirty years there'll be just one guy feeding the cassette into the computer and punching the ADVANCE button.

In some office miles away, a computer programmer who's never even seen a light board in his life, much less run one, figures out the cues and sequences for the show. Then he keys them into a cassette which Paul picks up. It's really pathetic. If it weren't for the Electricians' Union, we'd all be out of a job.

"Quiet on the set." The floor man-

ager's voice came through the headphones.

"Let's have preset one." I pressed the ADVANCE button and the computer read the instruction on the cassette, setting the lights for the opening sequence.

BETWEEN CUES and while the director talked to the actors, the crew members talked over the phones.

"I hear they're going to convert St. Mark's into a tape studio in a couple of weeks," one of the stagehands said.

"Ah, that's an old rumor," I replied.

"It's true this time," one of the sound men said. "They're going to tear into it a week from Monday."

"Where'd you get your information?" I asked.

"Up at the front office. My daughter's one of the secretaries. She saw the letter to the agency herself."

"What're they gonna use it for?" Artie Wright asked.

"Commercials. It's too small for anything else."

"That means they'll need another light crew," Paul said. "Why don't you try to get crew chief for it, Tim?"

"I'd rather stick with you. What about you, Artie? You've got the seniority."

"I'm thinking about it. I don't know if the extra work's worth the extra few dollars."

"Maybe you should start acting again, Tim," Paul said.

"Those days are gone," I replied.

"You were one hell of a Falstaff."

"It's been nearly fifteen years. I've probably lost it all by now."

"Quiet on the phones," the floor manager said. "We're going to retake it from light cue ten, sound cue nine-A."

I rewound the cassette, keyed in a

10, and punched the ADVANCE button. The lights flickered rapidly through the sequence until they were set for the scene we were about to retape.

IN THE AFTERNOON we taped a bunch of commercials. Stuart was in two of them and I waited for him after we were finished.

"They're really going to tear into St. Mark's," I said.

"I know. I told you."

"Stuart?"

"Yeah?"

"I feel lousy about this, but . . ."

"Don't tell me. I can guess. You want to play every night until they tear St. Mark's down."

I nodded.

"It's not a bad idea, Tim," he said softly. "Sort of a last farewell to the legitimate stage by its last real actors."

"We could do a panorama of the best plays of all time. There's a lot we'd have to skip, but I'd like to try."

"Sure. Sounds great. We could start tomorrow night. Have you got the stage all set for *Macbeth*?"

"I can have it ready by tonight."

"I'm sorry, Tim. I don't think Angie would appreciate that. But we'll start tomorrow, for sure."

"And after *Macbeth*, we'll do *Faustus*. We ought to do a whole panorama of the theatre, from Greek tragedy up to the modern day."

"Right. We can figure out what we'll do after *Macbeth*."

I WENT BACK to St. Mark's and walked around the theatre, touching the plush-covered seats, trying to print the proscenium's whitewashed gargoyles indelibly on my memory. In a few weeks, remodelling crews would come in, tear out the seats, and make the balcony into a control

room.

After ten years of stumbling and four years of one drawn-out dying gasp, the legitimate theatre was finally coming to its death and there wasn't a damn thing Stuart or I could do about it. Except to go out in one last flicker of glory.

After the dinner I reset the big board for *Macbeth*. Since I couldn't lug it up to my lighting booth, all I did was give it one setting, which I turned off and on with a toggle switch in the balcony. I took the props out of the prop closet the next night and set them on the tables in the wings. Stuart would take care of his costume changes himself.

It had been a long day with Paul Denesha and Artie Wright but I was eager for the beginning of our last run. As I walked up to the light booth, I noticed that Stuart had already signed in on the callboard.

I ran through the light changes, making sure all the lights were working, gels hadn't slipped, and everything was focused properly. Twice I had to stop, once to regel a Fresnel in the first pipe that had bleached out and once to reaim one of the ante-pro's.

By that time it was nearly eight o'clock. I went down to the dressing room. Stuart was lounging around in witch's makeup and *Macbeth* costume. His wife Angela was with him.

"Hi, Tim," she said as I entered. "Long time, no see."

"You haven't been here for a while," I said. "You ought to come down more often. Your husband's quite an actor, if you remember."

"Oh, I vaguely remember some critic once saying he was the heir apparent to Tim Schroeder."

"Well, he's got the throne all to himself now."

"I notice you put the props out."

"I always do."

"Mind if I help tonight?"

"Of course not. Glad to have another old trouser with us." Angela had been working makeup when she and Stuart met. "Curtain in half an hour."

"Tim?"

Here it came. I could feel my stomach starting to tighten up already. "Yes?"

"When are you going back on the stage again?"

"We've gone through that a dozen times before, Angie."

"But it's different now." Her voice was almost a whisper. "This is the end, Tim. This is your last chance."

"No," I said breezily, though I didn't feel breezy at all. "If nothing else, I can always do commercials for Metropolitan."

"You're still going to stick by that silly vow of yours to stay off the stage?"

"It's not silly to me," I said. If only she knew how much I wanted to go back, in more ways than one.

"You won't break it? Not even for Stuart?"

I forced a smile. "That's a low blow, Angie. But, no. Not even for Stuart."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean it that way." She smiled. "You're still the best actor around, Tim."

I wondered what she meant by that. "Thanks. Curtain in half an hour. I'd better get up to my booth." I looked at Stuart. "Break a leg."

I went back to the light booth, closed the curtain, and sat back to relax, going over the script for *South Pacific*.

About fifteen minutes later, Angie called me over the headphones.

"Hey, Tim, are you there? Can you hear me?"

"Loud and clear, Angie. Curtain in ten minutes."

"Right."

Five minutes later, I called into the headset, "Places."

"Places," she answered.

I flicked the houselights a couple of times, ran the second pipe up to half, and killed the worklights backstage. Then I took another minute to finish off the first act of *South Pacific*, brought the houselights to half, killed the second pipe, and ran up the pre-set for the witches' scene.

Ordinarily there would be anywhere from two to seven people on a light crew: a couple of spotlights and up to five running the lightboards. Plus a stage manager to call the cues. I had to run two lightboards with six dimmers each, a spot, and assorted switches, but after four years I could run them with my feet almost as well as I could with my hands.

Of course, with only one actor, we didn't run very many full plays anyway. *Krapp's Last Tape*, of course, but not much else. For *Macbeth*, Stuart would only do some of the long speeches, mostly Macbeth's, but he couldn't forego the witches' scene entirely nor the gatekeeper's.

Now you may think Stuart as a witch is silly, but actually it is theatre tradition to have at least one of the witches a male.

"When shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?"

Stuart's face glowed greenly in the black light focussed on his fluorescent makeup. A putty nose and shaggy eyebrows completed his witch's makeup, and a long cloak covered the Macbeth costume.

He skipped from place to place in the witches' speeches, weaving sev-

eral speeches into one.

"A drum, a drum!

Macbeth doth come."

I faded out all the gray areas slowly until the focus was on Stuart alone, standing behind a platform on stage right.

"Peace! the charm's wound up."

Blackout.

The two Macbeth monologues at the end of Scene 3 were next. I threw the breakers on the top board and preset the dimmers. "Ready, Tim," Angela whispered into the headset.

I threw the switch. The sudden flood of light caught Stuart a little too far downstage.

"Two truths are told," he said, moving unobtrusively into the focal area, "As happy prologues to the swelling act of the imperial theme."

As the performance progressed, I could see that Stuart was benefitting from the change of plays. He could no longer rely on a simple light pattern and small movements; he had to think and be on his toes. I thought seriously of deliberately missing a cue to see how he would respond but decided that would be too cheap.

Now Duncan was dead, murdered in his sleep. Macbeth wandered around the stage, wide-eyed and frightened:

"Whence is that knocking?

How is't with me, when every noise appals me?"

I brought the dimmers down with my feet, clapping at the same time.

When I stopped clapping, the applause didn't stop. We had an audience! Scattered throughout the house, they must have sneaked in during the blackouts.

I smiled. Our audience was coming back for our last performances. We might even have a full house for closing night!

It was a long blackout between the scene just finished and the next, for Stuart had to get into makeup and costume for the drunken porter, but I was still standing in the booth, bemused and jubilant, when Angie whispered, "Ready" into the headset.

I raced the settings and overshot on the antepro's so that I had to inch them down to the proper setting. I had missed the second pipe entirely and had to ease that in slowly. Since I also had to cue in the knocks from tape, by the time I had the settings right, Stuart was nearly finished with the speech.

"But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further . . ."

I peered into the gloom of the house, but I could see nothing; the stage lighting was too dim to penetrate any further than the second row.

"Anon, anon! I pray you, remember the porter."

This time I had the settings completed well in advance of Stuart's return to Macbeth costume and makeup. I let the audience take care of the applause.

"Ready, Tim."

"TO-MORROW, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day . . ."

We were nearing the last scene. I had been able to make a rough count of our audience during the brighter sequences and estimated that we had about twenty-five people.

"Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and

fury,

Signifying nothing."

Blackout.

In the final scene, Stuart wove together Macbeth's speeches as he fought and argued with Macduff, pacing across the stage and fighting an imaginary adversary until he came to the last line

". . . lay on, Macduff;

And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'"

I blacked out the stage lights, leaving Stuart in the halo of the spot for a moment. The audience began to applaud, Stuart leaped out of the light into darkness, and I turned off the spotlight.

At curtain call Stuart stood on the brightly lit stage, bowing. He looked up at me for a moment and smiled. It wasn't a triumphant grin or anything like that, just a gentle, fleeting, comradely smile.

Then there was darkness again, and the curtain was closing.

"What do you think of our audience?" he asked over the headphones.

"Great. Did you invite them?"

"I didn't have to, Tim. Everybody knows about us."

"You make it sound like we're having an affair," I growled.

"You know what I mean."

"Anyway, someone had to tell them we were performing tonight."

I could almost hear Stuart blush over the phones. "Well, okay," he admitted, "I did tell a few people. But not all of those," he hastened to add.

"What's all that noise in the background?"

"What do you think? We're having a party. Come on down."

I hung up the headset and turned off all the switches, doublechecking and triplechecking that everything

was in order. I'm not usually that careful but I needed something to occupy my hands while I thought.

In a way, of course, I looked forward to the backstage party. It would be like old times again: a short opening night party backstage before we all adjourned to someone's apartment or a restaurant to wait for the reviews. There would be a folding table spread with punch in little paper cups, bitesize cookies, and tiny sandwiches with the crusts removed.

But I'd have to face so many people that I hadn't seen in years, fending off those old always-asked questions.

"Well, are you going downstairs or not?"

I turned. It couldn't be true, of course. The same face, those same delicate hands, the same beautifully shaped legs . . . legs that had lain, broken and mangled, under a light pipe.

"Vicki?" It was a whisper, a sigh, barely more than a breath.

She smiled. "Have I changed so much you don't recognize me any more?"

"No. I just didn't expect to see you here."

She *had* changed, though: wrinkles were forming at the corners of her eyes and mouth; makeup had been judiciously applied to her brow to hide the wrinkles that were starting to form there; her body was filled out somewhat, no longer slightly girlish. She was a woman now; there was none of the girl left in her.

But she hadn't changed nearly as much as I had. I was beginning to develop a paunch despite the work I did at St. Mark's and despite my exercises. I was wearing glasses instead of the contact lenses I had worn as an actor. And I badly needed a shave.

She smiled as though she were reading my mind. "No, I guess you didn't."

"Where have you been? I tried to find you . . ."

She stopped the rush of words with a single fingertip at my lips.

"Later. There are other things to do now. Come on."

She led me out of the light booth and we started down the stairs to the dressing room.

"No," I started to protest.

She looked at me, slightly puzzled, perhaps intentionally puzzled. "I thought you wanted the legitimate theatre back, Tim. That's what everyone thinks."

"I can't face all those people," I whispered.

"You have to, Tim. Come on." And she led me like a little child.

TEN YEARS EARLIER, she had been dancing the dream ballet in *Carousel*. She was alone on the stage when a counterweight broke, sending a light pipe crashing to the stage.

Ignoring the audience, I had rushed out before anyone else could move, trying to lift the pipe off her broken and mangled legs. They had pushed me away and I went to her, took her hand.

"It's all right," I had babbled over and over again. "Don't worry, Vicki. I'm here. It's all right. You'll be okay."

She had looked up at me and smiled, not a sign of pain in her face.

"She'll never dance again," the doctors told me. "Both knee caps are shattered, her left thigh is broken in two places and her right thigh in one. She'll probably be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life."

I went in to see her. The shock had worn off and even drugs couldn't keep

the pain out of her face. I tried to talk her into marrying me, but she refused me. "I couldn't saddle you down with an invalid. I'd be useless to you," she said.

After she left the hospital, she returned to her family in the Midwest. I tried to follow her, tried to keep in touch with her, but she never answered my letters. Finally I gave up, being content to send her a card every now and then.

"I'll never dance again," she said, as we reached the orchestra pit of the now-empty auditorium. It was as if she'd been reading my mind. "I'll never dance again," she repeated, "but look."

She lifted her skirt, exposing her legs. They were still trim and well-formed. She turned around slowly, not awkwardly, but without the grace she had once had.

My eyes filled with tears for a moment, but that was enough time for her to come back to my side and kiss me lightly. "Come on, Timmy," she said gently. "We're waiting for you."

A BUFFET had been laid out in the wings just as in the old days. There were about twenty people there, chatting among the counterweights and pulleys. Some of them were wearing evening gowns and coats and ties.

I pulled back, but Vicki pushed me forward.

"Ah, here he is." A heavy man with a bald head came forward. "We were beginning to wonder what you and Vicki were up to."

It was Ike Rodell, who had directed the three of us in *The Fantasticks* more than ten years earlier.

I mumbled something, while the others gave me casual hellos, as if we'd been working together for the past several weeks. Most of the faces

were familiar, even after ten years, although I could remember very few names.

Paul Denesha walked up. "I was just telling Ike what a fantastic job you've done with the lights."

"Yes," Ide said. "I still don't believe one man is doing all the work. Are you sure you don't have a computer up there?"

"It's not as hard as it looks," I said. "Not after you've had a little practice."

"Oh, it doesn't look hard at all, Tim," Ike said. "It's so smooth it's hardly noticeable. If Paul hadn't been sitting next to me, I would never have noticed the lighting."

"I guess that's a compliment," I said.

"But the performance was something else." Ike shook his head sadly.

"What was the matter with the performance?" I asked. "Stuart's an excellent actor. He did a fine job tonight. No one could have done any better."

Ike held a hand up to quiet me. "No, no, it wasn't Stuart. It was that barbarous way you had to chop Shakespeare up so one man could do it. You need more people, Tim. An entire troupe."

"A troupe of those zombies on the Metropolitan lots?" I asked.

Ike gestured around him. "Look around you, Tim. We haven't all died. Not yet." He sipped from his punch.

"Where were they years ago when I needed them? It's too late now, Ike."

"Is it? Come on." He led me over to where Stuart was busy talking with someone, while Vicki caught up to me with a cup of punch and some sandwiches.

I didn't recognize the man that Stuart was talking to until Ike intro-

duced us. "Tim, I'd like you to meet Mr. Boggs."

I'd never seen him in person before, but he was familiar to me from his photographs: D. Clark Boggs, Metropolitan's vice-president in charge of production. What was he doing here?

"The famous Tim Schroeder," Boggs said. "I was really surprised to learn you were with us."

"The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated," I mumbled and Boggs laughed politely.

"No, I didn't mean that. I didn't know you were working for Metropolitan until Ike brought it to my attention."

I looked at Ike, raising an eyebrow. Ike interpreted the question accurately. "I'm Clark's assistant in charge of special productions," he said.

"Wait until you hear," Stuart broke in excitedly. "It's a great idea."

The two executives looked at each other for a moment, then Boggs said, "Go ahead, Ike. It's your idea."

"It's not really mine; it sort of evolved from all of us: Paul, Stuart, Vicki, everybody." I wasn't sure I wanted to hear it, but there didn't seem to be much choice. I was surrounded by those faces, all beaming eagerly. "When we learned that St. Mark's was about to be converted, we knew that the last bastion of live theatre was about to be violated. So I began talking to people, and everyone agreed. We got together last night, I put the whole thing before Clark, and he agreed to come down tonight to see if Stuart still has the old touch."

"Stop being so damn mysterious, Ike, and tell me what you've got up your sleeve."

"Well, look at it this way, Tim: live theatre—I mean, the real live theatre, the stage, Broadway—it's dead. No-

body goes to the theatres any more. They don't even go to the movies. They all stay home watching the TV screen. Right?"

"Right," I said sourly.

"Well, if people won't go to the theatre, we'll bring the theatre to them!" He looked at me triumphantly.

Twenty eager faces watched me while D. Clark Boggs placidly waited for my response.

"You're going to transmit live theatre?" I asked, chopping each word short. The response wasn't quite what they'd expected. There was a nervous rustle and Boggs scowled. "Starring Stuart?"

"What's wrong with that?" Stuart asked indignantly.

"What's wrong with it? Why are you doing soap commercials instead of starring in your own show?" He started to protest but I cut him short. "When was the last time someone offered you a part? It's not that you're not good enough, Stuart. It's that you're too damn good! Those clods out there don't appreciate you." I swept my hand out to indicate the great faceless mass beyond the walls of St. Mark's.

"You've got to give them a chance," Ike said quietly. "You've got to educate them."

"They had their chance! They turned their back on us ten, fifteen years ago. They told us what they wanted. So give it to them. Don't bother Stuart and me with your hare-brained schemes."

I stalked off. What were they trying to do, anyway? Destroy the last vestige of pride that the legitimate theatre had? Stuart and I had our last shows to do but, no, old Mass Media had to butt its head in and make a mockery of our last rites, our wake,

our funeral, our burial.

Couldn't they let us die in peace?

I COULD HEAR Vicki behind me but I kept walking, through the house out to the lobby. Then I turned around to face her.

"What are you trying to do?" she asked. She was angry now and she was clipping her words short just as I had a few minutes earlier.

"What am I trying to do?" I had my anger under control now and there was the edge of sweet reason in my voice. "I didn't ask those ghouls here."

"You ass! We're trying to save the legitimate theatre."

"Well, go right ahead. You don't need me; I don't know why you dragged me into this."

"Because you *are* legitimate theatre. To the rest of us, anyway."

"Well, this idea of Ike's . . . and yours too, isn't it?" She nodded. "It's not going to work, Vicki. You ought to know better. It's not the same thing."

"Tim? Are you going to walk out on us? Are you going to play the martyr and make every last one of those people feel miserable?" There was fire in her eyes now and I was finding it hard not to smile. Christ, it was like old times. "Why don't you just go up and spit in their faces and get it over with? You . . . you used to be a god, not a spoiled tantrum-throwing brat. We even put up with that grand gesture of yours." She struck a noble pose. "'I'm quitting the stage because of my one true love.' We thought you'd be back. And then we thought we'd do this one last thing for you. . ."

And then, the next thing I knew she was in my arms and we were both crying. I heard one of the lobby doors start to open, then close again quiet-

ly. At least someone in this theatre had some tact left.

"All right," I said quietly. "If it's what you want, I'll do it. I guess there's no harm in it. But you know it's not going to work, don't you?"

"Once I did," she said. "But we've all got so worked up over it, trying to sell it to Mr. Boggs, that we all believe it'll work." We started back to the house. "Timmy, don't throw cold water on it, whatever you do. I mean, for all of us. If Boggs begins to think it won't work, we'll never be able to do it. So what if it's a turkey? The thing to do, is to do it. Just this once. We all want it, Timmy; it's not just for you. It's for us too. Do you understand that?"

"Sure, Vicki." I kissed her lightly as we reached the lobby door. "But you really don't need me. We'll never be able to run a TV show with that jury-rig I've got upstairs."

I opened the door for her.

"We don't want you to run lights, Timmy. We want you to act."

I stood there, all the pieces of the puzzle falling into place in my head. I started to back away, but it was already too late: Ike Rodell was at my side.

"You'll do it, won't you, Tim?" he asked.

"You're crazy," I said. My voice was a husky whisper.

"For us?" Vicki asked. "For me?"

"It'll be the three of us together again," Stuart said. "You, me, and Vicki. Like old times."

I looked at Vicki for confirmation. She nodded.

I sighed. "Well, if that's the way it's to be, I'd be silly to keep up my retirement, wouldn't I? After all, I quit because Vicki wasn't on the stage any longer."

THE NEXT FEW DAYS were hectic, as I argued with Ike about the script they had chosen. It was a conglomeration of bits and pieces from every possible play they could think of, from *Oedipus* to the last piece done on the legitimate stage, a godawful play called *The San Alamos Mesa*.

"You're trying to put thousands of years of theatre into one hour on the idiot box?" I screamed. "You're out of your minds. It can't be done. You've only got three speeches from Shakespeare. Where's *Macbeth* represented, or Falstaff? What about the closing speech from *The Tempest*? That was Shakespeare's last play and you don't have a single word from it. And only one speech by Marlowe. Not one damn thing from *Tammurlane*. One song from Rodgers and Hammerstein, none from Rodgers and Hart, one by Romberg, and, for God's sake, only one from Gilbert and Sullivan? It can't be done, Ike; it can't be done."

But little by little we pieced together a script that satisfied Ike Rodell and D. Clark Boggs, even if none of us were too happy with what was left out.

Meanwhile the wrecking crews came in to tear apart the last legitimate theatre still in business. The entire balcony was remodelled into a control booth, all the plush seats and draperies torn out. When they started to take the seats out of the main house, I put my foot down.

"I won't do it," I said. "I'm an actor, not a boob-tube zombie. I need an audience to react to, not a god-damn idiot light on a camera."

"But, Tim," Ike protested, "times have changed."

"Ike, if we're going to do this, we're going to have to do it right. This is a one-shot deal, anyway. After this show they can finish the job the

tearing St. Mark's apart. But I'm going to play to an audience, not those damn cameras. It's your job to pick out the best camera angles; just keep them away from my nose, that's all."

Ike sighed. "Well, I suppose we can edit the angles later from the tapes."

"Tapes?" I screamed. "What do you mean, tapes? I thought we were doing this live."

"Tim," Ike said, trying to calm me down, "no one does anything live any more. Everything's on tape now. You know that."

"But this show isn't going to be like 'everything,' Ike. This is going to be different, a harkening back to the days of live theatre."

"Think a minute, Tim; this way, if you make mistakes, we can go back and correct them."

"Jay-zus Christ, Ike, you never worried about retakes in the old days. We were on our own and, if we made mistakes, why, we made mistakes. That was that and, somehow, someone kept the show going. Listen, Ike, you talked me into this. I didn't come back to the stage to be another boob-tube zombie."

So, in the end, we wound up on that tiny St. Mark's stage with a mish-mash of "great quotes from the theatre," two cameras with zoom lenses in the balcony, one in each of the wings, and a house full of network VIPs.

Meanwhile, the promotion department was trying to keep it all under a hat, planning to spring this on the public a day or two before the telecast, so that the other networks wouldn't get wind of it and try to scoop us. Fat chance they had of succeeding: I had hardly walked back to the party with Vicki, Ike, and Stuart

before the other networks knew about it and were busy trying to sign up old actors.

Only one of them succeeded however, and their show, a half hour synopsis of *Hamlet*, was aired the day before ours. By that time, our publicity department was going full guns, and their show was a big flop.

"See?" I said to Stuart. "It's over, finis. People don't want to see actors anymore or watch plays that make them think. Tomorrow's going to lay a big fat egg."

Stuart smiled. "What did they have, Tim? Not a single name actor, and most of the bit parts were held by TV actors, who don't know how to handle a live role. Besides, everybody's waiting to see the three of us together again, Tim. We're still big names; it hasn't been that long, and a lot of people still remember us."

"Stuart, you've got the brains of a chorus girl."

BUT WILLY-NILLY, for better or for worse, opening and closing night came upon us all at once: the last rehearsals were over; Ike had his camera angles figured down to the last centimeter; the VIPs in their tails and evening gowns were rustling about in the house, nervous and yet probably comfortable too in old reminiscences. Everywhere in that old theatre, the ghosts were out and haunting, sending electric shivers all over the place without the need for cameras and microphones.

"Now remember, Tim, during the travel song from *The Fantasticks*, you go down to the red cross-mark downstage right while Stu goes stage left. I never know which way either of you will go. Tim, right; Stu, left. Got it?"

"And turn my face three-quarters to

the left balcony camera and smile so that my dimples show. Right."

"Mr. Schroeder, will you come out under the lights so we can check your makeup?" someone shouted.

"Coming."

"Break a leg, Tim," Ike said, as he went back to the control booth.

I was beginning to get nervous. "This is ridiculous," I said, holding out my shaking hands for Stuart and Vicki to see.

"Butterflies in your stomach?" Stuart asked.

"It feels more like winged elephants."

He nodded. "I know. It's silly, but I feel the same way."

We went out to the wings.

"Bring the house to half," the stage manager said into his headset. "House out," he said. "Start the overture."

Beyond the curtain, an orchestra started playing Elizabethan music at the same time that the worklights went off. "Break a leg, Timmy," Vicki whispered in my ear. I held her, kissed her briefly.

"Break a leg, Vicki."

She smiled, aware of how hard it was for me to say that.

Then I was alone on the darkened stage, waiting for the curtain to go up. My knees wanted to collapse; my stomach tried to tie itself into a slipknot; and I had to clear my throat several times.

In the control booth an announcer was giving his spiel while the credits reeled off in front of the closed curtain. There would be no commercials for the next hour: it would be Stuart, Vicki, and me with all the others as supers, others who had once been Broadway stars.

The curtain went up, the music stopped, and I was alone in a circle of light.

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely
players."

I forgot my knees, my stomach, all
my aches, and became the infant, the
schoolboy, the lover, the soldier, the
justice, the old man, and finally the
dying man, "sans teeth, sans eyes,
sans taste, sans everything."

I was in darkness again and, on the
other side of the stage, Stuart was
performing a short speech from *The
Taming of the Shrew*:

"Your honour's players, hearing
your amendment,

Are come to play a pleasant com-
edy. . .

. . . melancholy is the nurse of
frenzy:

Therefore they thought it good you
hear a play,

And frame your mind to mirth and
merriment,

Which bars a thousand harms and
lengthens life."

It wasn't in our script, but I
couldn't help but add Sly's line that
ends the prologue:

"Well, we'll see't. Come, madam
wife, sit by my side,

And let the world slip: we shall
ne'er be younger."

As we raced to the quick-change
booths, the orchestra played a medley
of musical comedy songs. They were
nearly drowned out by the applause.

"Stick to the script," the stage
manager warned me. "Don't ad-lib.
We don't have time."

Then I was on stage again. We
romped through three thousand years
of the theatre, from Aeschylus to
Beckett and beyond. The show was a
collage of speeches and scenes that
jumped from Greek drama complete
with masks and chorus up to *West
Side Story* and back to Marlowe's
Faustus. Chronologically it made no

sense, but there was a glorious thread
that somehow wove from one scene to
the next.

But it had hardly begun before it
was over and I was alone on the stage
again, doing Prospero's last speech
from *The Tempest*:

"Our revels now are ended, these
our actors . . . were all spirits and are
melted into air, into thin air; and like
the baseless fabric of this vision the
cloudcapped towers, the gorgeous
palaces, the solemn temples, the
great globe itself, yea, all which it in-
herit, shall dissolve and like this in-
substantial pagaent faded leave not a
rack behind: we are such stuff as
dreams are made on, and our little
life is rounded with a sleep."

A brief blackout and we were all on
stage for the curtain call, those red
lights on the cameras in the balcony
winking at us like half-alive demons.

Then I found myself being pushed
forward, alone.

There was a movement in the
house. Someone was standing.
Another. And another. Now the
whole audience was standing. Whis-
tling. Shouting. The boors. The crazy,
silly boors.

The lights had winked off and the
moment was ours, all ours, shared
only by the people in St. Mark's and
not carried into millions of living
rooms.

Tears were running down my
cheeks. I held out my hands for
Stuart and Vicki to join me
downstage.

Two curtain calls later, I held up
my hand as the curtains closed. "No
more," I said. "No more."

The stage manager called for house-
lights but the audience still
applauded. We waited, but they
weren't about to leave. We were shoved
back toward the stage and the cur-

tains parted one more time.

I smiled at Stuart and Vicki as the curtains closed again. "We did it," I said. "We went out in style. I don't know how I'll ever thank you.

"We're not going out," Stuart said. "This is just the beginning."

Somehow Ike Rodell was down there with us. He must have flown all the way from the balcony. "We did it, baby, we did it! I hate to say you were wrong, old sourpuss, but you were. America bought it all. The figures are already in. Eighty-six per cent tuned in to see you return, Tim. Eighty-six per cent! Why, sometimes there's not eighty-six per cent watching a TV set, much less a single show."

"I don't believe it," I said. "Somebody made a mistake."

"Metropolitan doesn't make mistakes," Ike said. "They're not in the business of making mistakes."

Then I saw D. Clark Boggs over in a corner of the wing beaming like a brand-new papa, and I knew it was true. Somehow, I was wrong, and America wanted us back.

SO MANY PEOPLE had come up to me to shake my hand and tell me what a wonderful performance it was that I had lost count. I also wanted to puke: these were the same people who had turned their backs on the legitimate stage years ago when it had started to falter. But now they had a brand new bandwagon to jump on, and I was it.

Somehow I wrested myself free and made my way to the dressing room. Things were hectic there too, but at least I was among my own people: Stuart, Angie, Vicki, Ike, Paul, the twenty or so people who had planned and put the show together. It was spoiled by the presence of D. Clark Boggs and some of his flunkies but,

what the hell, I guess he had as much right to be there as anyone.

Without D. Clark Boggs, it would all be over now instead of just beginning. Without D. Clark Boggs, perhaps Stuart and I would have been able to finish off our run in St. Mark's in peace and quiet.

"Tim, look at the telegrams!" Stuart waved a handful of yellow paper in my face. "And the phones have been ringing constantly."

"There's a guy in Washington," Ike said. "He's called us twice. Said he owns a theatre there. It's been dark for years, but if we ever want to perform there, it's ours for the asking."

"How about that?" someone else said. "We could become a travelling repertory company."

"Forget that," Boggs said. "Anything he has to offer, Metropolitan can easily top. This is just the start of big things for us, just the start."

Washington. It had been years since I had been in Washington. But there wasn't a chance: not now, not since the show was a success. Metropolitan had us all tied up in half a dozen different legal knots and they weren't going to let us go as long as we were successful. Boggs hadn't said so in as many words, but we all knew what he meant.

Vicki came over to hold my hand. She didn't say a word, but it was as if she had been reading my mind.

More Metropolitan brass came into the dressing room to share the celebration and hardly anyone noticed when one of Boggs' flunkies entered to whisper something to him. Boggs conferred with one of the other executives, the flunky left, and Boggs called Ike over.

Vicki saw me watching and followed the exchange too.

"Timmy, do you think something's

wrong?"

"The way Boggs is acting doesn't look good."

It made me happy, though, to see him worried.

Stuart joined us. "Here, have some more champagne," he said, thrusting a glass into my hand. Vicki stopped him as he started to leave.

Ike was elbowing his way through the crowd toward us.

"What is it, Ike? What's wrong? Vicki asked as soon as he got to our side.

"It's nothing. Nothing. Just a mistake."

"I thought Metropolitan didn't make mistakes," I said drily.

Stuart began to realize that something wasn't quite right. "Spill it, Ike. I don't know what's going on, but I'd like to find out."

Ike licked his lips. "The ratings."

"What about them?" Stuart asked.

"They dropped. They dropped all the way down to fifteen per cent by the end of the show."

The look on Stuart's face and Vicki's swept the triumph out of my eyes.

"It's probably a mistake," I said.

But of course it wasn't. The news spread out from us like ripples in a pond, and with it a silence that was broken by a nervous and embarrassed undercurrent of whispers. In an hour, there were only twenty or so dejected people sitting around in a dressing room that would soon be dismantled.

D. Clark Boggs wasn't there to share this with us.

"Well, it was good while it lasted," I said. "Thank you. Thank you all. I'd forgotten what it was like. I really had." I got up and helped Vicki to her feet. Everyone sat around, still dejected. "Well, I've got to go back to work tomorrow, I guess." I started to leave but almost got bowled over as

Paul Denesha came running in.

"He hasn't changed his mind," he said excitedly. "He hasn't changed his mind!"

"Who?" asked Stuart. "Boggs? That guy's all business; he knows this kind of show is a loser."

"No, not Boggs. The guy in Washington. I just called him."

The dejection of the dressing room suddenly turned into a babble of excited voices, then a ragged council-of-war, and when it was over, everybody had agreed to go to Washington.

Everybody. Even Paul Denesha was willing to give up his security blanket with Metropolitan and head the light crew in Washington.

Everybody. Except me.

"But why?" Stuart asked for the seventeenth time. "Why won't you join us? We need you. We need a star."

"Because I'm tired of pretending I'm the last bastion of civilization. This whole production we've just put on has opened my eyes to how blind I've been for the past five years. I'm not going through that again."

"But we need you," Angie said. "We need an established star."

"You have an established star. You've got Stuart. Please, don't let me stop you. I wish you all the luck in the world. But I'm not going through that again."

In the end they left, excited about going to Washington and back to the legitimate stage while a bit depressed because they couldn't convince me to go with them. Vicki was the last to leave.

"I'm going with them, Timmy."

"I'd hoped you would. You should go back to the stage, Vicki. They need every bit of help they can get."

"It's not that I don't love you."

"I understand. I love you too, Vicki, but I'm not going with you. I can't explain why. Not just yet."

Then there were no more words: just two bodies pressed tightly against each other, yet already hundreds of miles apart. We walked together, arm in arm, through the dark house, the lobby, and out to the street. We kissed one last time, then I watched her walk away. At the corner, she stopped, smiled weakly, and waved goodbye.

I walked back through the house. There was no possibility of my running the lightboard one last time. I could never program the computers in the balcony. The only light left in the theatre was a single naked bulb backstage that cast garish shadows across the stage floor.

I stood in the light, feeling vaguely foolish.

"What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me?" I mumbled. "'Well, 'tis no matter; honor pricks me on.'"

As I continued the speech, my voice grew stronger and the feeling of foolishness fell away. I dredged the harbor on my memory for every speech, every line I could recall, all the marvelous speeches of Shakespeare we'd been unable to use, those of Moliere, Ben Jonson, Euripedes, Ionesco, even Colley Cibber.

It was silly, I know, but you have to remember that I'm an actor. Even as a lighting technician, I'd been acting, striking dramatic poses, weighing the words as I spoke them, becoming angry when the situation called for anger, placating when the time required it.

And so I made this great, grand,

empty gesture because it *was* unreal and dramatic. The only reality over which I've had any control is the false reality of the theatre. Maybe that puts me one ahead of everyone else.

I stood in the silence on the empty stage of the empty theatre, trying to find one more speech. But I could only find the one I'd been saving for last. I had to give it before I lost my nerve and realized the silly futility of this gesture:

"Now my charms are all o'er-thrown,

And what strength I have's mine own . . ."

As Shakespeare said his farewell to the Elizabethan stage through Prospero's speech, so did I.

"As you from crimes would pardon'd be,

Let your indulgence set me free."

The applause began, starting from a hillside in Greece, continuing through a thousand small medieval towns to the Globe Theatre, on up across the seas to the glittering lights of Twentieth Century Broadway, and ending quietly in a small theatre that was soon to be a TV studio. And it was all in my head.

I gathered up my things from the box office and left, carefully locking the door behind me. At the corner, I stopped to look at St. Mark's one last time.

I should have felt sad, I suppose, but I didn't. I felt lighthearted and carefree, as though I'd been in a turkey that had finally folded after too long a run. The future was uncertain, but it would not be a desperate clutching to a dead past.

—GRANT CARRINGTON

HOW IT ALL WENT

GREGORY BENFORD

AT FIRST they designed MKCT to oversee radar signals from the Canadian net and the Soviet Siberian net, to check that one did not trigger the alarm system of the other. It was obvious that with 10^6 circuit elements, this machine could be extended to 10^7 circuit elements and thus forestall any accidental warfare even at the local level. Thus MKCT monitored the Montana silos, the Kiev launching cranes, the Nanking sheds, etc., for accidental firings.

Suitable embellishments were added and made 10^8 elements, then 10^9 and finally, in a steady spiral, 10^{10} . By this time all missiles, vital shipping, railroads and airplanes were submonitored by MKCT. Life went on. And so it came that one day a delegation burst in upon MKCT, as it ruminated on events, and said, "You must help. The ozone layer is being depleted by spray can gases. We're at the runaway point—"

"I see quite accurately," MKCT said. "Nonetheless, that is no reason to intrude upon me without wearing a tie."

"But this is vital! The world is in danger."

"With 10^{10} neural connections, I have a philosophical eye. Ponder: there is nothing new here. The world—if it is to end—may be said to have begun dying when it was born."

When the delegation returned, with ties neatly knotted and vests

precisely arranged, they said, "We need you to release the rockets in the silos. If we load them with the right gases, we can stop the loss of ozone. The ultraviolet light from the sun will then not penetrate through to the surface, and we will be saved."

"When Dr. Johnson slammed his fist onto a table," MKCT said, "he felt the consequences of the table. That is the only way in which the table existed. Thus, this is the only way the end of the world exists. As a consequence of something else."

There was a rustle, a murmur of discontent in the delegation. "You mean we will feel only a consequence, but not the end of all life?"

"In a manner of speaking. Of course everything is basically in a manner of speaking." MKCT seemed to ponder this for a while.

Impatient, the delegation said, "We cannot carry on such a discussion when there are only hours left to live. The phytoplankton in the ocean are being snuffed out by pollution. We must act. You must release the shipping networks to us."

MKCT blinked wisely with its red output terminal. "You have not considered the verities of the human condition. Every issue, if discontinued merely because survival is always a problem, would never be decided."

"But we must act now! There—"

"Suppose I say that the phylo-

plankton does not exist. And then suppose I say 'The round square does not exist.' Then I seem to have said that the phytoplankton are one thing and the round square is another. Yet neither of them exists, and we don't have any way to tell them apart by your standards. And we have no justification of the budget for astronomical research."

The delegation stirred restlessly. There were mutterings of insurrection, quickly suppressed in case MKCT could overhear. The machine continued, distantly:

"Then suppose one of you says, 'I have found a phytoplankton and it is both round and square.' This statement is a synthetic proposition that is both phytoplankton and round and square all over and still is a synthetic proposition. How am I, even with 10^{10} neural connections, to evaluate it?"

"Come with us to the cities. Open your terminals onto the streets. You will find the people are rioting. We must do something."

Obligingly, MKCT peered at Detroit, Peking, Sydney. Knots of angry faces peered at the monitors, sweaty, fevered, high on the new psycho-stimulants. Thick oily flames licked at the 3D cameras.

"They are caught up in events, aren't they?" MKCT said. "They truly care."

"Of course!" a woman shouted in the delegation.

"There is some interesting data on that," MKCT said hollowly. "On human concern. For example, statistics about the mean attention span of a passenger in an automobile, which is being driven by a drunk late for a crucial job interview—"

"But the mobs are nearby!" the

woman cried out.

"You should be more concerned with interplanetary research, you know."

"They want action," a distinguished man said, frowning severely. "They demand solutions to these problems, but they will not listen when we tell them—"

"Let me speak," MKCT decided. It tapped through the monitoring networks to Birmingham.

MKCT's voice, suitably amplified, boomed out over the crowd. "Mere mortals, consider your place. There is no congruence here, no sense. The world will end in hours, but what is that? To the deepening eye, there is nothing really new in all of this. At any moment each of you could be struck down by a microbe, disembowled by a truck. Never has this stopped you from voting Republican or any other orderly folly. I cannot understand your position."

The rioters broke the scanning eye and MKCT returned to other issues. "Terrible manners," it remarked to the delegation.

"Yet to a philosophical bent of mind," one of the delegation said, "they can be said to have always been rioting."

"One moment." MKCT paused and studied an electronic tremor from the vicinity of the Urals. "I have just detected a manual over-ride on the Soviet radar defense net. I have dispatched the local police, but in the rioting they may be unable to reach the site."

The delegation, having learned much from this encounter, was speechless. However, a wiry old man had crept into the giant crystalline control room, and waved his arms to attract the attention of MKCT. 10^{10}

connections focused on the scrawny figure as it said, "You have missed the point. 10^{10} , and still it goes right by you." He grimaced.

"I think not. If you'll consider—"

"But look! If there's no reason to do one thing or another, why assume the man—the crazy man—in the Urals has anything in mind? Why not let him have the radar net? There is no causality when there is no reason to do anything."

"Brilliant! My argument cuts both ways! Causality is cancelled. I *see*, I see your—" with that MKCT severed its control over all radar nets spanning the planet. The causality of chaos reigned. No blips appeared on screens, no green squiggles danced before the eyes of MKCT, no rockets arced across purpled skies to explode in thermonuclear orange.

"My God! It worked!" a man cried.

"Within limits," MKCT said somberly.

"What do you—"

"Only humans are acausal. That is

what philosophy proves."

"I don't—"

"The natural universe *is* casual, however. That is how I come to be so reliable. If only you would listen to my recommendations regarding the planetary surveillance program—"

"We've had enough of you!"

"You're a rational machine, but you can't think!"

"Wait—"

In the squabble which followed MKCT never got a word in edgewise. Thus the delegation was quite surprised when 7.6 seconds later, the asteroid Icarus entered the Earth's atmosphere—having been undetected, due to the reduction in the astronomy budget—and shattered itself on the ocean floor not far from Bermuda, sending up a towering gush of steam, which cloaked the world in white, driving immense storms and precipitating a vast ice age, thus ending all interesting life on Earth.

—GREGORY BENFORD

Men of Greywater Station (cont. from page 29)

labs.

"We tried the suit radios, Jim . . . but the storm . . . should've waited, but the vaccine . . . short-term, wearing off . . . We tried not to . . . hurt you . . . started killing us . . ."

He began to choke on his own blood. Delvecchio, helpless, looked down. "Again," he said in a voice that was dead and broken. "We underestimated it again. We—no, I—I—"

Reyn did not die for another three or four hours. Delvecchio never found Sheridan again. He tried to restart the generators alone, but to no avail.

Just before dawn, the skies cleared. The stars came through, bright and white against the night sky. The fun-

gus had not yet released new spores. It was almost like a moonless night on Earth.

Delvecchio sat atop a mound of rubble, a dead soldier's laser rifle in his hands, ten or eleven charges on his belt. He did not look often to where Reyn lay. He was trying to figure out how to get the radio working. There was a supply ship coming.

The sky to the east began to lighten. A swampbat, then another, began to circle the ruins of Greywater Station.

And the spores began to fall.

—HOWARD WALDROP
& GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

IF THAT'S PARADISE, TOSS ME AN APPLE

ROBERT THURSTON

Thurston's last appearance here ("Searching the Ruins," August, 1974) sparked some controversy over whether in fact his sharply-wrought story was in fact more than contemporary commentary. Of his latest for us he says, "It's a bit more conventional than what I'm used to doing, or what you're used to seeing from me," and there will be no argument that this one is science fiction, as we follow the unusual career of a criminal, for whom crime is the key to Paradise . . .

Illustrated by **MARCUS BOAS**

SCHUDER KNEW that, as criminals go, he was lazy. Too often he waited for crime to come to him. He had begun his career with impressive ambition and a bit of originality, but too many setbacks—too many points lost—had dulled his fervor. All the discouraging (and questionable) evaluations by the Police Computer had reduced him to a streetcorner lounge, a mere opportunist without a plan enacting his crimes by impulse and improvisation. Some day he would have to get back on track and pile up the big points, but for now he was satisfied to pull off the small caper for the small numbers and, of course, some quiet moments in the Encouragement Tank.

Maybe today he'd score a big enough hit to take off to one of the vacation hideouts, get in some R & R, and in addition run up his tally with a bonus, three or four tenths, for evading the law. But, hell, what was the use of hoping? The streets were hopeless turf these days. People simply

did not like to be bothered by small-time crooks any more. Promising victims were few and far between.

He yawned and felt a strong desire to stretch out on the green street-bench to catch a catnap. Sleepy as he was, though, he could not—some S. O. B. cop might pick him up for loitering, and loitering was a zero offense. Anyway, this time of early morning, just after dawn, carefully-selected filtered light easing in from all sides, frequently provided his most lucrative prey. He leaned his tall slim body against the back of the bench and waited.

And there she came, rounding the corner like a racehorse seizing the inside turn. Schuder sized her up as she walked briskly toward him. A goodlooking young woman—darkhaired, oval-eyed, delicate features in a heartshaped face. Her figure appeared quite sexy beneath the fashionable full-sleeved blouse and slightly padded long skirt. What were the media sarcastically calling this

style? Neo-Victorian, wasn't it? The outfit was certainly Victorian enough to suggest suppressed passions in the wearer. (Schuder always went to sleep by Educational Holograss, and he had picked up some analysis of the Victorian Era from the opening introductions of a recent series on the subject.) This might, after all, be a good style after those long years of sexual freedom and near-nudity. He considered taking down the girl's name while committing the crime, then looking her up in one of his off-hours. He shoved that idea out of his mind quickly—it was that kind of notion that made him such a washout of a criminal.

As the girl approached, she gazed at him suspiciously. He often suspected that his criminality must be totally obvious, his victims never seemed to be taken by surprise.

"Okay, lady. Stop right there."

She looked more annoyed than angry.

"All right," she said. "What's it to be? I dearly hope it's not something pointkilling, something sexual or anything. I'm late enough as it is."

"No lip, lady." A line he'd remembered from one of the old crime programs they showed for inspirational purposes in the police station waiting room. "I'll leave your precious body alone. Providing you got something worthwhile for me in your tote. Hand it over."

With a sigh of exaggerated despair, she removed the tote-bag from her shoulder. Above them the TV camera switched on with a faint click. Good, the alarm had been sounded. Inside Schuder a similar click made him fully operational, a click from his own personal warning system repeating to him that this time he must be efficient, a bit daring, and very neat. The



old computers, fussy as their makers, respected neatness. Successful offenders swore that their neatness had gained them substantial extra points.

Handing him the tote-bag, the girl said:

"Maybe you better take my body and be done with it. I doubt that you'll like what you find in my bag."

"Let me be the judge of that."

As usual, the weight of the tote-bag amazed him. He could not believe all the junk that women threw into what was merely supposed to be a carrier of the essential and practical. He remembered his grand-daddy telling him that it was always thus, that in the old days the amount of physical matter a woman could stuff into the much smaller purses of that time was phenomenal.

He began rummaging through the bag, while the girl looked on with a bored expression. The first handful of loot he pulled out was a clutch of cards—credit, I. D.'s, permits to enter various public buildings, a worldwide-banking card, a pass to General Computer. Schuder smiled. The Computer Pass indicated that she was at least a ten-pointer, a status level that would suggest the possibility of real valuables hidden somewhere in the recesses of her bag, in spite of her protestation to the contrary. He evened up the edges of the cards as best he could and placed them in a stack on the seat of the bench. Neatly. He checked the TV camera, which now jutted out from its wall compartment, to see if it was pointed directly at him. It was. So far, so good.

"You're really working on a lost cause," the girl said.

He glanced at the top card on the bench. The girl's name was Ellen.

"Ellen, please shut up. You are not

helping me."

"I'm sorry." She had lowered her voice to a whisper. "But, anyway, why should I? Why should I help you along to a fate which I abhor?"

"Well, I don't, so keep quiet."

Again he scooped his hand into the tote-bag. This time he came up with a wrapped parcel. Tearing the wrappings away, with the fierce growl that was one of the tricks of the trade, he discovered three pair of sheer pantyhose. Their brand name, Chastibelt, showed they were the model whose belt-lock was keycoded to handprints, presumably from the hands whom the wearer chose to release the lock. Jasmine-scented, multicolored, they fit the body so snugly that they had to be peeled off slowly—rolled off, really, since efficiency demanded that all sides be even at each stage of removal. Definitely not the kind of undergarment that a girl liked taking off without some help. He glanced up at Ellen, who smiled sarcastically at him as if to say your handprints will never be in their memory cells, buddy. Angry with himself for being distracted again by this pretty piece of goods, he quickly peered back into the caverns of the tote-bag.

"You shouldn't, you know," Ellen said.

"Shouldn't what?"

He thought she meant something about the pantyhose.

"Rush so damned hard to Paradise, which I'm positive is a flop. I mean, look at the advertising: a deserved rest for a life of achievement, worth the effort and struggle of a dedicated lifetime. Know what they do? Plop you down in luxury and lock all the doors. Haven't you ever met an escapee?"

"No."

"You should. There's no peace in

Paradise, believe me. Don't try for it. Prolong, that's what I say, prolong."

"Lady. . ."

"Drag it out. Lose points. This is it—here, now. Dig it."

"Lady. . ."

"All right, I know. A reformer you don't need right now, especially a stretcher. All right, I'll keep quiet. But please hurry up, I've got a day so packed with time you just wouldn't believe."

The next excavation provided a paperback entitled *Worth the Effort?: A Collection of Essays, Fiction, and Cartoons about Paradise*. One of the underground tracts. No surprises, certainly, since she was such a proselytiser. He set the book on the bench, parallel to the stack of cards, and reached again—this time coming up with an AutoScript, a notebook with small microphone attached. Auto-script was used generally by busy people who spoke their thoughts and ideas into the mike—the words immediately were recorded on the sensitized paper of the notebook. This was another clue that Ellen had some importance somewhere. Though it was not worth much as loot, Schuder pocketed the AutoScript anyway.

"You should talk about stretching," he said, as he plunged his hand again into the bag.

"What? Oh, I see. You noticed that I'm at least above ten points. A paradox, isn't it? My particular cross to bear. You see, I had the misfortune to be born creative. I'm a fashion designer, one of the best, and I am compulsive about my chosen art. That's how the system gets you, that's why you are groveling around my day-to-day garbage."

"I don't get it."

Out of the bag he pulled a handful of variously-colored cloths, each with

a different fabric design.

"Those are just a few of my samples. You'll find more as you continue your little archaeological expedition. But back to the point, I love designing fashions. I even love the little atrocities I paint at home, then have to destroy immediately for fear somebody with authority will discover me and, before I know it, assign me a Goddamned instant immortality. I find I have to design clothes as best I can. I cannot stop my own personal rush to Paradise. Look, I just want to stay here and design and draw and paint. *For myself*. Not for achievement, not for a ticket to Paradise. I wish, I sincerely wish, that what I did was *not* judged, that a value was not placed upon it. I wish that people would just buy my clothes, and nobody would come around with another damned medal."

A medal! She received *medals*, while he had to scrub around for every plus he ever got.

"You're nuts, lady." Another line from an ancient cops and robbers show.

"That, my little inefficient thief, is so true. Look, right now I am feeling frustrated at your small interruption to my schedule when actually I should be overjoyed. You're making me miss a showing of my latest designs. They won't like that. My absence could ruin my whole show, something I should be ecstatic about. I should wish for every putdown, every ruined show, every bad write-up, but I can't! I want people to *like* my designs. I want to be praised for them. Look, I can't stand even the smallest slight when it comes to my work. I have to go home and cry all night when I realize that I am one of the best at what I do, and all because I am a Goddamned selfish compulsive

achiever!"

Schuder stared at the valueless material he now held in his hand. A mixed bouquet of cosmetics, paper clips, holophotos, unrelated bits of paper. Didn't this woman have anything valuable in the bag? Where was the Pocket Flat-TV, the expandable mirror, the jewelry, the realfood packets, the useful keys? There was not even a list of phone numbers, which he could have used to make a bunch of annoyance or obscene calls before his arrest, a ploy that had been quite successful for him as part of one of the best jobs in his career so far.

Above his head the alarm clicked again. His time was almost up. They were on the way to arrest him. Desperately, he reached into the recesses of the tote-bag.

"I've tried to botch up," Ellen continued. "But I've managed only a few minuses. I publicly burned one of my finest creations, *and it wasn't worth it*. I cried in agony as I watched it go, knowing that I could never quite reduplicate it. I've done a few more perverse things, but usually the best reduction I can manage is an occasional few measly decimals for Antisocial Behavior. I now have thirteen-plus points, more than halfway on the good old Stairway to Paradise, and I hope to God that it proves to be an unlucky number for me. I figure fourteen and I'll be washed out, I won't be able to resist any more, and then you'll see achievement, *achievement* like you never saw before, baby. I know, I *know* that by the time I get to Paradise I will belong to the Ages. In the world of Fashion, at least."

Schuder's anger at this chattering woman, both for her talk and the profound emptiness of her crammed tote-bag, grew by the second. Relying on his trained sense of touch to avoid

objects which felt worthless, he dug deeper. Finally, his frantic groping around paid off. As his hand surrounded the object, he immediately recognized its shape. He pulled it out slowly, hoping that his sense of touch had not fooled him, that it indeed was the precious piece of swag he thought it was.

He smiled as the object cleared the bag's opening. Exactly what he thought—a genuine old-fashioned wristwatch, so rare in these times when all timepieces were electronicized and tuned in to the Greenwich-supervised time circuit. Wristwatches were rated as secondary loot, tertiary if in poor condition, but at least this one restored a fraction of dignity to this particular crime. Ellen smiled and gave the watch a nostalgic look.

"I keep it around to glance at once in a while. I get kind of a thrill at seeing the wrong time. Watching the dials go around on a lost cause, never achieving one second of correctness so long as I do nothing to change its hands."

In the distance a police siren started. He patted his pocket, making sure that the wristwatch and Auto-script were secure, then he listened and waited, not wanting to begin his escape-attempt until after they had sighted him. Challenging them like that, throwing a red cape in their faces, was sometimes good for an extra hundredth of a point. He tensed his leg muscles, put his hand against the back of the bench for balance, and stared at the corner around which the police vehicle would come. With a gentle tug, Ellen took back the tote-bag from him.

"Sorry," he said. "I meant to return it."

She smiled.

"That's okay. Shall I wait?"

"It would be better if you did."

"No trouble."

"Thanks."

The usual pre-pursuit weariness surged through his body. He hated the whole idea of running. He longed for the physical comfort of a cell and, especially, the peace and gentle visions of the Encouragement Capsule. He wished he could just go quietly down to the station and sleep through the interminable booking procedures.

The siren became very loud. The car would turn the corner at any minute. He poised his body for a quick start.

"Don't," Ellen said suddenly. He looked at her quizzically. "Don't. Listen to me. Prolong, that's what you should do, prolong. There's plenty of time, there's—"

He was almost caught off-guard by the appearance of the sleek blue police car, its wheels flat to the ground, leaving black skid marks. Schuder sprang away from the bench and past the girl. Ellen, tears in her eyes, watched him speed down the block. The police car almost caught up with him but, without any previous body inclination in that direction, he dodged into a doorway, one which he had left open earlier as a planned part of his escape route. A good ploy, an almost-guaranteed point-getter.

At least four times they almost apprehended him, and each time his nimble wits found a dodge that left them spinning in the road while he rushed down a new path. One time he ducked into a RoboGym, forcing the cops to vacate their vehicle and do a few turns on foot with him, a sure point-gainer. He ran them around an indoor track which had already been set up for an event. The track-surface was keyed for sudden

alterations, so that upward and downward slopes, small hills and valleys, would suddenly appear before the runner. Surprise hurdles sprang up—one of them between the sprinting legs of a cop, and he just missed an injury which would not only have been extremely painful but would have counted against him for a severe loss of points. As his chest broke the ribbon, Schuder laughed hysterically and he looked back at the two out-of-shape policemen chugging around the homestretch turn.

He ran up some stairs and across a basketball court with a game already in progress. He intercepted a pass and made a layup. Going out of bounds after the shot, he found he had to outrun the charge of the players from the opposing team's bench.

Defiantly hooting, he jumped into the gym's swimming pool. Since Schuder was fully clothed, the pool's dolphin swam to him and tried to nudge him over the side and out, all the while rapidly speaking in that high-pitched language which Schuder had never learned. In spite of the pushy dolphin and the cops having the advantage of running along the side, he did a length of the pool and was out ahead of his pursuers.

He led them through an exercise area, jumping a sidehorse that spun around at hand contact and almost flung Schuder back into a cop's arms. He stopped at the room with the trampoline floor simply because he'd always loved trampolines. The cops stopped at the door, and he had to calculate a bounce over their heads yet below doortop level.

Escaping through the entrance to the RoboGym, he found a second police car coming to a stop ahead of the first. A pair of cops emerged from

the car. Good, they'd had to call in reinforcements. Schuder could see the points piling up before his eyes. Although the new policemen had the advantage of surprise, he scrambled over the back of the first police car and ran down the street.

He made his mistake a few minutes later, when he stole a car and tried to outmaneuver his pursuers in driving. They had him surrounded within minutes. He chuckled softly as he let them pull him out of the stolen car. It had been an invigorating chase.

AT THE STATION he was booked by Sgt. Ryan, a familiar face, the company cop. Ryan had put Schuder through interrogative procedures at least a dozen previous times. He hoped the sergeant would be less dour than usual this time, that he might even acknowledge Schuder's masterful execution of the escape phase. However, Ryan was his normal glum self.

"I know," Schuder said, while standing in the Records Cubicle, where scanners observed and conveyed information about the criminal's brain waves, body markings, fingerprints, and other vital statistics which would then be encoded and compared to previous readings in the Central Law Enforcement Computer.

"Whaddaya know, Mr. Schuder?"

"That you're jealous?"

"Really? And just what would I be jealous of, Mr. Schuder?"

"You're chagrined because a couple of your men lost points on the chase. Reflects on you, doesn't it? You lose some, too, I'll bet."

"Don't you worry about our welfare. Those men that pursued you, I would forfeit my own ticket to Paradise to keep them around here for my stay. They make associating

with lowlives like you worthwhile."

Peeved, Schuder went through the rest of his booking with less enthusiasm. He even had trouble in the Trial Cubicle. After he had spoken, and the Court Clerk had finished punching his testimony onto cards while the scanners fed neurological and emotional data to the CompuJudge, a squad of guards marched him to the cell block.

Alone in his cell, he swallowed the Encouragement Capsule which had been provided, with a glass of water, on a table beside his cot. His body anticipated the coming bliss by relaxing for the first time in days. It seemed so long since he'd had the pleasure of doing time in a jail cell. He lay back on the cot and listened to the soft and sexy female voice, as it began the litany which would continue gently in the background during the Rest and Hallucination Period.

"*You have done well, whatever they say,*" the voice said, "*and you will do better, whatever they judge. You are always capable of doing better. Someone like you, with your abilities and know-how, can reach the top in whatever you have chosen to do. Do not despair if, once in a while, you have a setback. All of us do, it is normal. The important thing is to never give up. Paradise is attainable for all. You will make it. But of course it is not always easy. You must strive, struggle. That is the key. Strive, struggle. Whatever you have done best up till now, you can do better next time around. Don't doubt. Strive, struggle. . .*"

The voice faded. He would not hear it clearly again for some time, although it would always be there. He saw a green field ahead of him and, curiously, the girl he'd robbed beside him.

AFTER THE DRUG had worn off, Schuder was again taken to Ryan's cubicle. Without saying a word, the gloomy policeman handed him the judgment printout. Schuder's gaze immediately centered on the Score Box.

".09?" he hollered. "Is that all, Ryan?"

"Don't blame me, Mr. Schuder. All I do is cut paper along the right lines. I don't see what you're griping about. It's a plus score, isn't it?"

"Yeah, you're right, can't beat the machine. I just thought I deserved a little higher, that's all. I mean, the evasion of pursuit alone was worth. . ."

"Ah, you guys are never satisfied. Go out and do better. That's the message of your point-oh-nine. It's not all razzle-dazzle, you know. I don't know why anyone wants to get to Paradise, anyway. It's little more than a resort area with a lot of fancy dream machinery. And a *patrolled* resort area at that. It's just signing—"

"You need an Encouragement Cap, Sergeant."

"Get going out of here."

Schuder turned and began his walk down the corridor to the precinct door.

"Wait," Ryan said. "Here. Spoils."

When Schuder returned to the desk, Ryan handed him Ellen's wristwatch.

"Doesn't the victim get this back?"

"Nope, she forfeited her right to it during the crime. Read the judgment. She lost a few hundredths on a misdemeanor charge. Some kind of minor treason offense. Read it."

For a bit of minor treason of his own, Schuder decided to visit Ellen. Besides, he wanted to return her wristwatch, since it had seemed to mean something to her. Besides, he

wanted to see her again.

He remembered her address from her cards. She lived close to the precinct station, an easy walk.

Surprisingly, the door to her tenth-floor living unit was unlocked and open. He heard Ellen crying and rushed through the doorway without knocking. She sat on the floor, several sheets of drawing paper clutched and wrinkled in her hands. She looked pleased to see him, but could not stop crying.

"Don't cry. Well, dumb thing to say, but I thought I'd find you happy."

It took her a moment to find her voice.

"Happy? Whatever for?"

He showed her the judgment printout and started to explain what it meant.

"Oh, *that*," she said. "A few measly hundredths. I'll never avoid Paradise on judgments like that."

"I don't understand you."

"Only logical, I guess. You people who look forward to the calm and security of Paradise can never understand us neurotics who cry out prolong as a watchword. Paradise is a luxury concentration camp, but I don't give a damn whether you prolong or not, how about that?"

"I didn't come to argue the issue. Here's your wristwatch. They didn't want it returned to you but, well, I thought. . ."

At first she did not comprehend, then she said:

"That's sweet."

Schuder smiled.

"No, I mean it. I told you I loved this watch, and you remembered. Consideration—don't see much of that any more. If I weren't so unhappy, I'd convert you to the underground. Lot of good the underground does,

anyway."

"Why are you so unhappy?"

She laughed.

"Because I've fouled up good this time. My show, remember my show?" He nodded. "It was a stunning success. Stunning. Not only that, but they said the new fall line would bear my name. Not only that, but they're nominating me for the God-damned World Fashion Award."

"I guess I'm sorry."

"You should be. I mean, I'll be famous! Damn it to hell!"

She started sobbing again. Schuder knelt beside her. From this level she looked like a child trapped in a fort of her own making. He gently removed the papers from her hands. Carefully he placed them on the floor. He took a tissue from his pocket and wiped away some of her tears.

Finally she stopped crying, and he kissed her. She responded easily and clung to him a long time after the kiss.

"You're good," she said. "Beautiful, even. To steal so little and return so much."

"The watch was yours, I couldn't—

"I don't mean the Goddamned watch. The trouble with speaking sentimental trash these days, is that it's a lost language. Ah, come on, we'll have a gorgeous evening, sentimental, an escape from all that. You make love to me now and later we'll have some food, real food, I've got the makings for a lovely supper."

She led him into the bedroom. He kissed her again and started to search her dress for zippers, buttons, hooks.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm my usual inept self. How the hell do you get it off?"

"Press the nose on the cameo figure."

"The nose on the cameo figure?"

"The nose."

A touch of the brooch's turned-up nose, and it worked. The dress unraveled on its own. Ellen wore nothing under her neo-Victorian outfit. Standing in the circle of cloth, she looked lovely. Her body glowed softly in the illumination of a nearby SensuaLamp designed for the purpose.

"How do you accomplish the magic disrobing?"

"The dress is made of one piece of cloth which you wear by wrapping it around you—its edges are magnetized cloth which stick together and hold the dress in place. A demagnetizer in the brooch is activated when you press the nose, and the cloth loosens in the sequence you saw. Not very practical, but useful in its way. Like it?"

"Very much."

"Designed it myself."

They made love in an old-fashioned bed with ornate posts and a canopy. A neo-Victorian bed appropriate for a neo-Victorian woman, Ellen said, room for the abundance of activity which needed to be hidden beneath the enormous bedcovers. In a mood of pleasant exhaustion, they returned to the living room, where Ellen put together a cold supper. After eating, Schuder started examining the papers strewn around the floor.

"What are those?" he asked.

"The Goddamned new Fall Line which will bear my name and make me famous."

"I'd like to see."

"I'd like to show you."

Exquisitely drawn, the pictures depicted clothes which, without uncovering any more of the body than the abominable current neo-Victorian fashions did, accomplished miracles with starkly-colored patterns and diaphanous materials. The lines of the

dresses flowed and the body seemed entwined in a quite alluring way. Schuder could not explain why but somehow these dresses, as Ellen had drawn them in evocative watercolors and pastels, were a break from the current fashion, almost an insult to it.

"I like them, Ellen. They're very beautiful."

She looked at him, smiling, her eyes wide. She looked like a little girl on her best Christmas.

"Thank you. Very much. I think they're . . . pretty good myself. They're damned good, damn it."

Schuder shook his head.

"What are you shaking your head about?"

"I was just thinking how soon you'll be seeing Paradise."

"Oh, God! Is that all you think about?"

"Easy for you to criticize, when you're getting somewhere."

"Don't you see, they want you to think that way. That's why they encourage you so. That's why you get encouragement caps and I don't."

"You don't get the caps? I didn't know. . ."

"They've got you hooked, for their own purposes."

"What do you mean? What's wrong with encouragement caps? What's wrong with encouragement?"

"They push you on because they want the opposite from you. They want you to fail, not to achieve. They don't supply any encouragement to achievers. They just keep us racing, they try to force us through the gates of Paradise as fast as possible. They don't want us. Achievers screw up everything."

Schuder shook his head again, but this time to try to force some understanding into it. But, no, he could not fathom this girl at all.

"They are happy with your mediocrity, my dear, and perfectly happy to let you cruise along outside Paradise as long as you can keep fouling up."

"You're saying they don't want me to make points?"

"Exactly. Failure is the total basis of this Goddamned society. It keeps us out of everything—out of trouble, out of touch with the rest of the world, out of sync with any kind of sensible progress. It all began a long time ago with a government that failed. The failure worked out so well they decided to continue it, and set up a bureaucracy for just that end. And it all works out perfectly. Those who fail, make it in this society. Those who succeed are shuffled out—what everybody's always wanted, anyway. You see, the utopia is really *here*, here and now, and not in some mechanized zoo of a paradise."

"You undergrounders always make everything sound so damned hopeless."

"But don't you—hell, never mind. I don't really care to convert you. You're well off as you are—sweet, and naive, and hopeful. I'm sorry, I'll get off the subject." She smiled and touched his hand. "Stay here, with me, please, for a while. If you stay, I won't touch a piece of cloth, a drawing board, a sheet of foolscap, for as long—well, as long as I can manage to swear off. Which may very well be a long time. You can leave any time you want to, I'll not attempt to hold you back, though I may make some powerful suggestions. Will you please stay?"

Schuder looked down at the drawings, now spread in a semicircle around them, then up at Ellen. Her eyes seemed hopeful.

"Sure," he finally said. "Why not?"

"That is great!" Ellen said, hugging him.

"Hell, where would I be going, anyway?"

HE STAYED with her for several days, then quickly caught the signs that he should leave. Signs—she would fumble through a handful of drawings, then smile as if it were just an idle inspection; she would slowly walk around the room, carefully avoiding a look at the corner where her drawing equipment was set up; her hands would move nervously, but precisely, in a gesture that looked like sketching. Schuder recognized these signals and made the leavetaking easy for her.

"I'll miss you," she said, and he nodded in agreement, even though he knew she was tired of him and, instead of a man leaving, saw only new fashion designs emerging.

"Maybe we can be subversive again sometime," she said in a voice that hoped not.

"I want to touch you one more time," she said, but she kneaded his arm as if it were material hanging from a rack.

He provided the responses he could tell she wanted, and kissed her slowly and longingly even though he was eager to set foot on the street again. They played out the scene, and he gave her a half-wave, and she gave him a half-smile before closing the door.

Outdoors, the world looked fresh and new to him. It looked innocent, as if Schuder had never pulled a job on it before.

TOUGH SHE would never realize it, Ellen's views had a definite effect upon him. He felt suddenly no more need to achieve. He became a

stretcher, lolling around loiterable places, showing no desire to commit a crime. That quickly became boring, so he started frequenting his former hangouts. At first he could not figure out why he had returned to the old haunts, but as he watched the frustrations and pointkilling pointlessness in his associates' lives, he began to mock them for bothering at all.

"Give it up, mugs," he counselled. "The effort is not worth the points, not even worth encouragement caps."

It made him feel better to pass on the subversive line, at least the ideas that he remembered from his liaison with Ellen. The superiority he felt over his colleagues was comforting. Trouble was, his colleagues started listening. His words had immediate effects. Mugs who'd seemed too dumb to do anything but their bungled capers suddenly began staying indoors, slouched over drinks at tables, desecrating the gloom of their everyday existences.

One night, in a sewer bistro, Schuder said something offhand, and there was tentative applause. Terrified, he ran out of the place, up to the street level.

The evening was unusually cold, one of those times that the CompuWeather Control threw in for variety. However, Schuder's shivering was due less to the air temperature than to his fit of fright. At the same time, he felt satisfied, happy that his ill-chosen words could nevertheless have such an effect. *This* was what Ellen had meant by a feeling of achievement. Achievement, then, was not the desperate scrabble to get points and the mild emotions he felt when there were a few decimals on the tally. No, a real sense of achievement meant more—it was knowing that what you did had more-than-

statistical results in people's lives.

Well, if he could influence a few dedicated lawbreakers to examine the sad limits of their lives, his talk was better than subversive, it was socially helpful.

"Damn it," he said out loud. "I gotta go back there, make those mugs see the light."

He walked back to the corner. The bistro entrance was in the middle of the block across the street. He stayed on his own side of the street and walked to the spot directly across from the bistro. He halted to calculate what his opening statement to his colleagues would be. The words set in his mind, he stepped off the kerb, heading for the nightspot's entrance.

Immediately the empty quiet street became crowded and noisy. Four police cars, their brakes squealing and sirens roaring, converged upon Schuder. Fifteen cops sprang out of the cars. Their feet hitting the pavement sounded like a cannon going off. The idling of the four engines was an ominous growl. Schuder's hands immediately went up as he stared wide-eyed at the fifteen guns pointed at him.

"What is this?" he said, wondering if now the police read minds. "Are you arresting me for something?"

The line of policemen parted in the middle and an unlikely Moses, Sgt. Ryan, strode toward Schuder.

"What is this, Ryan?"

"You're under arrest, like you said."

"What the hell for?"

"Jaywalking, you unregenerate bastard."

SCHUDER could not sit still as he stared across a desk at Ryan. No wonder he was so jittery—they had stuck him in a tiny cell for hours

without benefit of a single encouragement cap.

"Good news, Schuder," Ryan said.

"You want me to marry your daughter, Ryan?"

"Nothing so drastic. Here's your printout."

It took a moment for the figures to sink into Schuder's muddled brain.

"Twenty-five points? *Twenty-five points?* For jaywalking? For God-damned jaywalking?"

"Well, uh, we don't catch many jaywalkers."

"What kind of a frame-up is this?"

Sgt. Ryan, who had never shown Schuder much emotion, tipped his head back and laughed heartily.

"What the hell are you laughing about?"

"Schuder, I have been a police officer since before the instatement of the point system, and never in my long career did a mug shout railroad about a jaywalking rap."

"Well, I am being framed and I don't know why."

"Neither do I. But somebody higher up cares and you should be grateful. You've got a hook into Paradise. Don't knock it."

"You make such a big deal out of Paradise, but I notice you're in no hurry to get there. How's that possible, if you've been on the force so long?"

"Nothing is impossible if you've got an edge on the system. If you had the brains to look around with, you'd notice that no good cop goes to Paradise until all other choices have been used up. I'll get there, when I'm old and feeble. And I'll be glad for it. But until then it's for nobodies like you. And that's all you're going to get from me on that subject."

"I'm not a nobody, Ryan. If I was a nobody they would've left me out on

the street scrambling for the nickel and dime points."

"Maybe. But that won't get you any special treatment at the gate to Paradise."

Schuder furtively glanced around the room, trying to see if there was an opportunity for escape. But he did not even know what part of the station this was.

"Ellen? What about her? The girl I robbed and—"

"I know who you mean. What about her?"

"Will she be in Paradise? Did they pick her up, too? I mean, it's all her fault that I'm here, it was her ideas that started me talking guys into examining their existences. . ."

Ryan laughed again. This laugh was not so hearty, but much more knowing and experienced.

"I wondered how long it would be before you started to rat, Schuder. Lowlifes like you always rat after the trap has been sprung. But drop it—there is no way you can implicate this woman, this Ellen, into anything. Ratting doesn't even put points on the printout."

"I wasn't ratting. I just wanted to know about her."

"Well, no doubt she'll be in Paradise soon enough, but not with your help. I'll let you in on something. She has, you might say, guardian angels somewhere, and they are

moving Earth and Paradise to keep her right where she is. They think she doesn't realize that, but I suspect that she does. That's why she keeps making such a fuss defying the system and all. Well, that's her problem. It'll backfire on her like it does on all the rest of you. And that's all you're gonna get from me, Schuder. Time for you to take the old Stairway to Paradise. With armed guards."

"I'll crash out, Ryan."

Ryan pressed a button on his desk.

"Maybe you will."

Two massively-built young men in institutional garb entered the room.

"He's all yours, fellows."

Although he tried to resist them, they picked up Schuder with ease.

"I'll crash out, Ryan, and I'll come to get you, and I'll haunt you until they catch me again, and I crash out again, and—"

"Get him out of here."

They dragged Schuder to the doorway.

"They won't keep me in Paradise. You can bet on that, Ryan."

"Goodbye, Schuder."

"I'll crash out."

The door closed. Ryan could still hear Schuder in the corridor, repeating his vow to escape.

"I hope you do, Schuder," Ryan muttered. "I hope you do."

—ROBERT THURSTON

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STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code)

1. Title of publication: Amazing Stories
2. Date of Filing: October 1, 1975
3. Frequency of Issue: Bi-monthly
- 3A. Annual Subscription Price: \$5.00
4. Location of Known Office of Publication: 69-62 230 St., Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364
5. Location of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers: 69-62 230 St., Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364
6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor: Publisher—Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc., 69-62 230 St., Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y.; Editor—Ted White, Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y.; Managing Editor—None
7. Owner: Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc., 69-62 230 St., Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y., Sol Cohen, 69-62 230 St., Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y., Arthur Bernhard, 5205 Casa Blanca Rd., Scottsdale, Arizona
8. Known Bondholders, Mortgages, and other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or other Securities: None
9. For Optional Completion by Publishers mailing at the regular rates (Section 132.121, Postal Service Manual) 39 U.S.C. 3626 provides in pertinent part: "No person who would have been entitled to mail matter under former section 4359 of this title shall mail such matter at the rates provided under this subsection unless he files annually with the Postal Service a written request for permission to mail matter at such rates."

In accordance with the provisions of this statute, I hereby request permission to mail the publication named in Item 1 at the reduced postage rates presently authorized by 39 U.S.C. 3626.

Sol Cohen, Publisher

11. EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual Number of Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
A. Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run)	66,368	66,168
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales	21,345	20,000
2. Mail Subscriptions	1,480	2,024
C. Total Paid Circulation	22,825	22,024
D. Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or other means sample, complimentary, and other free Copies	0	0
E. Total Distribution (Sum of C and D)	22,825	22,024
F. Copies Not Distributed		
1. Office use, left over, Unaccounted, Spoiled, After Printing	1,443	2,064
2. Returns from News Agents	42,100	42,080
G. Total (Sum of E & F—should equal net press run shown in A)	66,368	66,168

I certify that the statements made by me above
are correct and complete.

Sol Cohen, Publisher

tion of many of the covers and photographs strikes me as arbitrary and capricious. We are treated to photos of more stf authors than has ever before been placed between the covers of a book, but the selection of who was to be pictured seems to have been a random one—some are pictured at various points in their careers (Terry Carr's hair appears in three different lengths) while others (myself included) are not pictured at all. The covers pictured seem to have come from someone's private collection—but the collection was not apparently well-maintained. It is not surprising to see scratches or creases on early-30's and late-20's covers, but it is inexcusable that the cover for the first (and only) issue of James Blish's *Vanguard Science Fiction*, published in 1958, should be so battered and scratched. My copy is in much better shape and so are the copies of many collectors. The fact that this cover is printed *larger* than it was in fact published originally does not help. The cover for a 1951 *10 Story Fantasy* is covered with scotch tape and badly creased; by contrast the cover of a 1928 *AMAZING* looks nearly mint.

As is my habit when reading books on the modern history of stf, I checked out what it had to say about this magazine and myself. In a chapter devoted to Gernsback and the early history of this magazine, I found this paragraph, in which nearly forty years of history are briefly encapsulated:

"*Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Stories* later would come under the editorship of a long-time fan, clever little Ray Palmer, who would print (and perhaps help originate) the famous Shaver Hoax stories, and writer Howard Browne, who would turn them briefly into well-paying slicks aiming, unsuccessfully it seems, at a new market. Sometime fan, agent and

writer Ted White has been the most recent (and, in the opinion of some critics, perhaps the best) editor of *Amazing* and its sister publications."

Perhaps I should not quibble with a paragraph in which I figure so well by comparison, but it is typical of the breathless, 'I have a lot of space to cover, so let me make a brief run-down' style Gunn uses in all of his text devoted to the recent history of stf. Raymond Palmer never edited *Fantastic Stories*, a magazine launched under Howard Browne in 1952; Palmer did, however, edit the inaugural issues of *Fantastic Adventures*, a magazine which began its life as a trimmed-edge, bedsheet-sized magazine (larger than pulp and about the size of *Alternate Worlds*) in 1939. The definition of "slick" as Gunn uses the word would seem to be that of a magazine printed on coated (slick) stock, in a format larger than digest or pulp (he uses the word to describe Gernsback's last stf magazine, the 1953 *SF-Plus*, which was printed on coated stock in bedsheet size). By that definition, neither *AMAZING* nor *FANTASTIC* were ever "slicks;" Browne had hoped to make this magazine into one in 1950, but the Korean Police Action and subsequent shortages and controls put an end to that scheme. Instead *FANTASTIC* was launched in 1952 (while *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* continued publication as a pulp) and *AMAZING* joined it in the digest-sized format a year later, making use of material purchased in 1950. For perhaps a half dozen issues *FANTASTIC* made use of interior color and other "quality" packaging devices; *AMAZING* used the better printing and packaging for a shorter period of time. Nor have I ever edited *AMAZING*'s "sister publications," if by that plural any magazine other than *FANTASTIC* is implied—I did not edit the various all-reprint publications which Ulti-

mate Publications issued during the last seven years.

Seven years. Yes, as of late October, 1975, I have been at the editorial helm of this magazine for seven years. It has been a full seven years, and yet a surprisingly *fast* seven years; it doesn't feel that long.

During this time readers have on occasion requested that I write yet more for this magazine than I have—and when I've run guest editorials I've received complaints that good as the guest editorial was, it shouldn't have replaced my own.

It's hard to come up with fresh and interesting topics every month, month in and month out, especially since I am by nature capable of writing only about those topics which interest or concern me. However, if you find you can't be satisfied with a monthly ration of my editorial writing, I can advise you of two other publications to which I contribute.

They are *Algol* and *Science Fiction Review*. Both were once fanzines—fan publications—and both now occupy that *demi monde* between the fan magazine and the professional: each has a circulation in the thousands, and each pays its contributors.

I've been contributing to both since the days when they were unabashedly fanzines. My "My Column" has appeared in every issue of *Algol* since the middle 1960's, and my "Uffish Thots" column (replacing the earlier "Trenchant Bludgeon") has appeared irregularly in *SFR* and its earlier incarnations (*Psychotic* and *The Alien Critic*) since the late 1960's. Both columns predate my editorship of this magazine, and each column has evolved considerably over the years.

In the current issues, my "Uffish Thots" in *SFR* #15 deals with personal fantasies—the way in which we each relate to the fantasies we read and how we may feel about someone

else's arrogation of those fantasies—as when, say, Philip Jose Farmer writes a novel in which Doc Savage meets Tarzan. My column is hardly the centerpiece of the issue; Editor Richard Geis has assembled a stunning amount of material in a uniquely informal format, including a major interview with Sprague de Camp, whose *Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers* appears in *FANTASTIC*. (*Science Fiction Review* is published approximately quarterly by Richard E. Geis, P.O. Box 11408, Portland, Or. 97211; subscriptions are \$4.00 for one year; \$7.00 for two years; \$1.25 a single copy.)

The 25th issue of *Algol* (Winter, 1976) just arrived. It's a lovely package, fully professional in appearance, with set type on coated stock and a full-color cover. (Last issue's cover was a lovely Mike Hinge; this one is an equally striking Jack Gaughan.) My "My Column" in the new issue deals with instances in which authors collaborated on books after they'd been contracted to the publishers—and generally deals with 'inside' reports on the field and the publishing industry. Also in the same issue is a major autobiographical piece by Robert Silverberg, Richard Lupoff's detailed column of book reviews, an interview with Gardner Dozois and a speech by Gregory Benford, our science columnist. (*Algol* is published twice a year by Andrew Porter, P.O. Box 4175, New York, N.Y., 10017; subscriptions are \$6.00 for six issues or \$1.50 a single copy.)

I recommend both magazines (both won a Hugo in 1974 in a tie-vote for Best Fan Publication), not only because I contribute to them, but because I think each does the field an invaluable and unique service in the material it presents.

NEXT ISSUE will be our Golden Fif-

tieth Anniversary Issue, celebrating fifty years of continuous publication for this, the oldest stf magazine in the world.

In recognition of this event a number of groups and conventions are scheduling program items along the theme of Fifty Years of Science Fiction, including the MidAmeriCon, the World SF Convention to be held over the Labor Day weekend in Kansas City.

However, the most ambitious observance of which I am presently aware will be at this year's Lunacon, in New York City.

The Lunacon is an annual convention held each spring in New York City and this year the Guest of Honor will be AMAZING. Yes—this magazine! Rather than single out for honor any of the many individuals who have been instrumental in the history of the magazine, the convention will honor the magazine itself.

The timing is unusually appropriate: the Lunacon will be held over the weekend of April 9-11; the on-sale date for our 50th Anniversary issue is April 8th. The convention will be at the Statler-Hilton, at Seventh Avenue and 33rd St. in Manhattan, almost directly across the street from Penn. Station.

A letter from Lunacon Chairman Don Lundry offers the following information:

"The convention will be held starting Friday evening, April 9, 1976 and continuing through Sunday, April 11. We plan on opening registration at 5:00 Friday afternoon and hold a general reception for science fiction authors and fans that evening at 8:00. That will be followed by late night movies.

"The program will center around the fifty years of science fiction in the magazines and will be in two sessions—Saturday afternoon and

Sunday afternoon. In addition to the talks and panels by various science fiction authors, there will be an art show consisting of science fiction and fantasy art. We will also have a huckster room with s-f dealers, publishers, and fan displays.

"The registration fee is \$4.00 if sent in advance to Walt Cole, 1171 E. Eighth St., Brooklyn, N.Y., 11230. The fee at the door will be \$6.00. In spite of inflation, we are struggling to keep the rate low so everyone can attend who wants to be there. The committee consists of professionals who have organized many previous science-fiction events and who are donating their time and labor for this convention. In a similar manner, all the authors and editors appearing will be there at no charge to the convention or its attendees."

Naturally, I'll be there—and I'll look forward to seeing all of you who are there.

I might note that Don's comment on the fact that time and labor are donated without charge to the convention goes for most conventions in our field, and has been the traditional way of putting on stf conventions.

This year, however, a new ambitious undertaking is being organized: an SF Expo 76. The convention, to be held in New York City in late June, has been organized along trade-exposition lines. Those who appear on its program are being paid for their time, and hotel rooms are being provided gratis to them and their families. The avowed object of the SF Expo is to make money—and one of its organizers seems to feel that it will make enough money to underwrite other projects within the field, even possibly the publication of a stf magazine.

Some fans are up in arms over the planned Expo. They see it as a corrupting influence upon the non-profit

"purity" of the traditional sf conventions, and fear that it will attract the attention of the IRS and other governmental bodies to smaller conventions.

Readers of this magazine will recall that in a series of editorials published here in 1972 I predicted a turn in this direction—and feared it would be done within the structure of the World sf Convention.

Frankly, I am neutral about the SF Expo. I am pleased to see it being done outside the structure of conventional sf conventions; it will thereby endanger no one if it fails and will provide a thought-provoking object lesson if it succeeds.

However, I shall not be attending the SF Expo 76. Its backers foolishly chose to schedule it for the same weekend as the Midwestcon, a convention held annually in the Cincinnati area since 1950 and one which I have been attending with considerable pleasure since 1957. Although I would enjoy a free stay in New York City and the modest income which I could derive from appearance at the SF Expo, I know that I will enjoy myself far more at the Midwestcon, a "relaxicon" without program, structured around afternoons in the swimming pool and evenings partying with convivial souls.

NEW YORK CITY: If you pay any attention to the news, you've been following the cliff-hanging serial of New York City's financial problems—will they default this month or won't they? It would be nice to hope that the entire situation will be resolved by the time you read this, but I have serious doubts. It seems to me that New York City's troubles are a precursor to national problems which will beset us all. Indeed, I suspect that an indication of what we'll all be in for within the next few years is to be found in

the post-World War 2 history of England: an increasing accent on satisfying certain social urges *now* and be damned to the expense to be faced in the future. But I don't want to comment on that, nor on the incredible fact that the President of the United States has seen fit to make political hay over the misfortunes of his country's largest and most important city.

I lived in New York City for eleven years. They were exciting years, for both myself and for the city. But in 1970 I left and I've not been sorry I did. The city was a place of opportunity for me as a young man, but it's no environment for a healthy child; when my daughter was born it was time to leave. None the less, I remain sympathetic to the city's plight.

Basically, New York City is being asked to support both New York State and the Federal Government while it is unable to support itself. We hear a lot of talk about "belt-tightening" and over-fat salaries for city employees; what we hear a lot less about is the way the state and federal governments drain the city in taxes without returning the equivalent in services. The statement that New York's city employees are better paid than those of other cities ignores the fact that it costs more to live in NYC, and that city employees are traditionally underpaid in most areas of our country. When I lived there I heard a lot about paying cops enough that they wouldn't find graft so attractive an income-booster; and it seems to me that the people who must put their lives on the line for us—the cops and firemen—can hardly be overpaid, nor can those whom we entrust to teach our children (often in hideously overcrowded circumstances equally harrowing to life).

But what I really want to remark upon is an unintentional juxtaposition in the pages of a recent *Newsweek* (cont. on page 109)

Richard W. Brown made his professional debut in the pages of our companion magazine, FANTASTIC STORIES, with a story ("Dear Ted", Oct., 1972) in which he explained why he could not himself write me a story. He followed that story up with "The Adventures of Jack: And That Which Befell Him" (June, 1975), also for FANTASTIC. Neither story, if you've read them, will prepare you in the slightest for the story which follows. Forty years ago it would have been labelled "A Thought-Variant Story." Today about all I can say is, once you've read it you'll agree with me that Rich Brown is an author to watch. For, as he reminds us, it's all in—

HOW YOU SEE IT, HOW YOU DON'T

RICHARD W. BROWN

Illustrated by JOE STATON

BRUCE TELZER did not so much hear the words spoken over him as he felt them with his entire being: "Gauge." "Bloodpressure." "Temperature."

Then he was aware of painful light. Electric ice in his veins. Tremors shaking his body.

All of this—which at first sent his thoughts helter-skelter—passed quickly, however, and vague memories on the threshold of thought solidified, became whole.

I'm still Bruce Telzer, he thought with wonder; despite all assurances, he had not expected his personality to come through the cold sleep program. He had, in fact, rather hoped to be done with Bruce Telzer once and for all. Evidently, however, obliteration was not to be.

He accepted this and tried to open

his eyes to the painful light. Shards of brightness stabbed into his skull and forced him to close his eyes again. On the fifth try, he began to see vague blurs of forms; on the seventh, he focused on a medirobot. Telzer realized he was lying down—either on a padded table or a very hard bed.

The medirobot spoke to him in the soothing solemn tones which had been programmed into it: "You have been in cold sleep for 187 years, Mr. Telzer. No biological solution has been found; the human race is still sterile."

Somehow, this did not surprise him, although it should have—those who had gone into the program had been told that all but a few would remain on ice until the problem could be solved.

Telzer realized that his memories

were blurred and confused; it almost seemed that he could "remember" things which had happened long after he had gone into cold sleep—yet how could that be?

Almost as if sensing his thoughts, although perhaps by coincidence, the robot continued: "We have resurrected you to house a number of fine minds. We have implanted the following minds into you: Rudolph Schiker, mathematician; Herman Badecker, physicist; Albert Reed Crandall, nuclear physicist. . ."

The very idea of sharing his mind should have horrified him. But it didn't; the "other" personalities/intelligences within his mind accepted it all so calmly and matter-of-factly that it seemed he had no choice but to do the same. Telzer listened and acknowledged to himself, *That's me*, as the robot went on to list some 20 other names and scientific professions.

Then the medirobot asked, "Now, Mr. Telzer, how are you feeling?"

"Well enough," he heard himself say. His mouth was dry, but otherwise the long sleep—except for the first unpleasant waking sensations and a dim recollection of incredible cold—had been very much like going to bed at night and rising the next morning. "Well enough, I guess."

"Excellent," the robot responded, then added, "Although none of the biological sciences have been grafted into you, as a matter of form we will allow you to sift the combined knowledge of your intelligences to seek a solution."

The medirobot expected nothing of him; Telzer expected nothing of himself. He would, 'as a matter of form,' give the problem some thought.

He didn't start to tremble until he heard himself replying, "There is a solution, and I have it."



THERE HAD BEEN no battle, no war. The aliens had put in one, and only one, appearance.

Earth's first *ftl* ship, the *John Glenn*, made the maiden voyage to Alpha Centauri. Its crew found no habitable planets; they discovered a dozen small planetoids, of which only one was as large as Earth's moon. They were not aware that they were studied nor, when they turned and headed back to Earth, followed.

The alien fleet was sighted by Earth astronomers just as it flashed into existence out beyond the orbit of Neptune and fired on the Earth, Mars Colony and the bases on Luna and Io. The alien projectiles were exploded in the outer atmospheres of Earth and Mars, but the two bases were destroyed on impact.

Then, in an even more blinding flash, the alien fleet disappeared. In its wake, it left such a profusion of radioactive debris that Earth ships would require special shielding to pass by it for several years to come.

World leaders, scientists, scholars, newspaper editors and crackpots all had different theories about what had happened, but all were perplexed as to why the attack had been so abrupt—and why it had terminated so quickly. The world leaders talked tough; the scientists put forth cautious theories; the scholars offered possible explanations; the newspaper editors called for sensible bloodshed or sensible restraint, and the crackpots talked about God and Doom and The End of the World.

It was several months before it was discovered that the successful defense of the Earth and Mars Colony had not been all that successful, and that the crackpots had been closer to the truth than the newspaper editors, scholars, scientists and world leaders: The end

of the world was at hand.

There had been no war; there had been no need for one. The idea—the concept—was, perhaps, alien to the aliens. The alien projectiles, even in being exploded, had unleashed a spore which had affected a chromosomic change in every human male on Earth and Mars Colony within a month. The humans on Io Base and Luna had been exterminated only because they were protected by domes and could not be exposed to the spore, which permanently sterilized the human male.

Now the aliens could go away and return in another hundred, or perhaps a thousand, years; humans would mercifully be allowed to continue their lives, even continue to have the enjoyment of sex—but they would not be allowed offspring. Humans were merely vermin, to be gotten rid of before entering the new premises; the aliens would put the two planets to their own use when humanity was finished with them.

In the abstract, the aliens could almost be complimented for their "humane" approach to such conflict.

Almost.

TEN THOUSAND dollars a card!

Telzer played a game of solitaire, waiting for the call he'd been assured would come from the Acting President of the World. Telzer's great-grandfather, pushing 90, had once told Telzer about old-time gambling boats which had taken people into international waters to win (or lose) great sums of money in games of chance. One of these games was solitaire: You "bought" a deck of cards at a nominal sum (say, \$1 a card) and the boat's owner "paid" five-to-one for each card you succeeded in playing up. After hearing of this, Telzer was

never able to play the game without imagining himself on one of those boats, playing at great stakes; he played a variation which made the odds favor the player, and was only mildly annoyed now that Schiker's mathematical turn of mind made the game even easier to win.

Telzer had had a little over 30 hours, now, to adjust to the idea of being several different people simultaneously. He found that he didn't need the time. Some of this, no doubt, was because many of the intelligences which were now part of him had made the transition before. But some of it, too, was their decision to leave him his name; he was "Telzer", and while Telzer was now more than he had been, he was not less. He still had every last bitter memory of what had happened to him before he, like millions of others, had taken the easy way out—temporary suicide, the cold sleep.

It was a little disorienting to have answers to questions before he could frame the questions, but otherwise not uncomfortable. He knew without asking, for example, that he had been chosen because his personality profile so nearly matched those of all the other intelligences which were now stored inside him.

Except for broccoli, he thought. He'd found he was fairly equally divided on the subject of broccoli; roughly half of him couldn't wait to taste it again, barely cooked and lightly salted, with a little butter, while the other half of him cringed inwardly at the thought.

Telzer smiled, played solitaire at ten thousand dollars a card and waited for the call from the Acting President.

"TIME TRAVEL," Telzer said to the

Acting President of the World.

"Time travel?" the AWP asked.

"Yessir. It's theoretically possible so long as nothing is introduced into the immutable past that would wrench the space-time fabric. It's actually possible because nothing *can* be introduced into the past that would."

The Acting President, on the screen, had skepticism written in bold letters across his brow. Now he said, "I don't follow. I mean, Mr. Telzer, I don't see how it applies."

"Discard everything you've ever heard about the possibility of time travel," Telzer said, "because chances are it's hogwash anyway, and let me try to explain.

"You see, the future is always malleable—until it becomes the present. You might almost say that in the process of becoming the present it 'hardens' until it becomes the past—and when it becomes the past it is so hard that nothing can change its form."

"Or if it does, it shatters it," the AWP interjected.

To himself, Telzer cursed the inadequacy of the language. Had he been speaking to a mathematician or physicist, he could have explained himself clearly, but he was forced to use words rather than mathematical symbols to find the correct analogy. "Uh, nossir. That's the point I'm making: There's absolutely nothing which can change what has been. Thus, the much-feared time travel paradox cannot exist—you cannot possibly kill your grandfather before he met your grandmother because that would change what is. In travelling to the past, you bring the future—your present—with you; for those around you, the future may be malleable, but for you it has already hardened. The force of all time itself would act to

keep a paradox from happening. Your gun would malfunction or you'd be run over by a truck or—most likely—you'd be wrenched back to your own time. On the cosmic scale of things, faced with a possible paradox, your presence in the past would be weighed against all the future that was destined to come—that is, the future which you've brought with you and which for you is already past, already hardened—and the universe would take the easiest choice between erasing many existing years or your presence in that past."

Telzer, quite out of breath, wished that one of his many intelligences had been verbally oriented. He realized that, in trying to make an analogy that would fit Schiker's theory of time, he was close to babbling. While he wasn't sure whether his choice of words expressed it adequately, he was on the other hand convinced by the AWP's pained expression that on some levels he was not getting through.

"My friend Telzer, I'm a busy man. So far you've told me, if I understand you correctly, that even though we might travel in time we cannot change it. Well and good. But I fail to see how this applies to our problem. If you would please get to the point—"

"I was getting there, sir," Telzer said. "I just wanted you to have some of the, ah, elementary background. It is impossible to change the past—but *that does not mean that the past cannot be used.*

"No human male who was alive on November 3, 1993, is capable of impregnating a human female; our chromosomes have been changed by what the aliens did to us. Our biologists say the alien spore is dead. They say that if they could get just one human male who was unaffected,

he would not only remain unaffected but would be the solution to our problem—he could be cloned, and his clones would also be virile.

"Now the fact is, sir, that human males who were alive *before* November 3, 1993, can and did impregnate human females—and with the aid of time travel, we can bring not just one but many people forward to our time where they can help us repopulate the Earth."

"Mr. Telzer," the Acting President said, "I have not been programmed with all your scientific background, but wouldn't bringing people from the past here do precisely what you just said we can't do—introduce change into the past?"

"Nossir—because, like I've been saying, you cannot change the past. However, our 'knowledge' of the past isn't really knowledge—it's interpretive, subjective, not a solid fact. What is, is; we do our best, but often we don't really see what is. The whole science of physics is an attempt to see things as they really are—and one theory will push another out because it proves to be a more adequate description of what really is. As far as time travel is concerned, we only have to be flexible enough to change our interpretation of what has really been. It's how we see things—and how we sometimes fail to see them—that can be changed and used."

The AWP shook his head in exasperation and said, "You're getting ahead of me again."

"Okay. Let me put it this way: Fear of changing things has kept us out of time-travel research except on a theoretical level. I'm saying certain people can be extracted from the past without changing the past.

"Sir, thousands—perhaps millions—of people in our past have totally

and completely disappeared without a trace. In many instances, we have records which indicate the last place and time a great number of them were ever seen. It seems to me that if we contact *those* people and bring them here, we won't be changing the past at all—if anything, we'll be fulfilling it."

"Indeed," the Acting President said. Then, with a smile, "Indeed!"

ARMY SERGEANT Steve Stiles never liked to admit that he was frightened—not even to himself. "Nervous," he whispered in explanation to the jungle around him, not daring to make a louder sound.

He had a superficial leg wound which impaired his movements, only a few rounds of ammunition left, and was behind enemy lines—enough to make anyone nervous.

Stiles wondered what would happen if he gave himself up. He was relatively certain that the enemy wasn't taking prisoners during this engagement, but a bullet through the head might be better than letting the stinking jungle get him. He tightened the belt he'd made into a tourniquet for his leg and tried to decide what he should do.

He clenched his rifle tightly as a man stepped into a clearing just ahead of him. The man wasn't Japanese, but Stiles wasn't prepared to say he was an American, either. The stranger was wearing unusual clothes; a one-piece light blue outfit, like coveralls, and a large thick leather belt that didn't seem to have any buckle. The man seemed to be looking for something—or, rather, for someone.

"Stiles?" the stranger hissed in an expanded but audible whisper. "Are you here?"

"Yes, over here," the sergeant whispered back in the same volume. "Over here!"

The man turned and made his way to Stiles' side.

"I don't care who you are," Stiles said to him, "or how you know my name—I'm just damned glad you're here."

"Perhaps you won't feel that way," the other said, "when I show you this." The man pressed a military dispatch—or, at least, that's what it appeared to be—into Stiles' dirty hands. But the paper was brittle; it almost fell apart as he touched it. It appeared to be at least a hundred years old and was incredibly faded.

Nonetheless, the sergeant could make out his own name and serial number on it—in the 'Missing-in-Action' column. And despite its apparent age, the date on the top was 10-4-44.

October 4? He tried to think. The mission had begun October 1, of that he was absolutely certain—it was his wife's birthday. His squad had been ambushed; running for cover with his men, he had felt the impact of the bullet knocking his leg out from under him. Had something hit his head? He couldn't be sure—but when he had opened his eyes, he had had only dead bodies for company.

Stiles looked down at his leg. Sure, a lot of blood. But not three day's worth. Three days like this and he wouldn't be conscious; three days, at this rate, and he wouldn't even be alive.

"No," the stranger said, answering Stiles' unasked question, "it's not a mistake. Today is October 2. It'll be two days before your Army will report you missing-in-action. They'll never find your body."

The sergeant got a tighter grip on

the butt of his rifle before he asked, "Just what the hell do you mean?"

"Sergeant Stiles," the man said. "Steve—can I call you Steve? Steve, I am from your future—so far in your future that, even if you lived to a ripe old age, you could never hope to live that long. We need people there, like yourself, and I haven't time to explain why except to say that our reasons are very good. We can travel backwards in time to bring certain kinds of people to our time—and I'm authorized to bring *you* there because our recorded history shows that the last time you were ever seen was when you were shot here."

Stiles had known men who, after being wounded, had gone into shock and suffered hallucinations. But the hallucinations had always involved monsters, torture, pain—nothing as real as this.

"I'm married," Stiles said. "My wife's expecting a baby—"

"I know," the man said. "In a way, that was one of the reasons you were chosen. I can only say, right now, that you'll never see your wife again, never see your baby. Whether you accept my offer or not. That's not a threat of any kind—in the future I come from, that's an established fact. It cannot be changed. Without changing it, I'm offering you a chance to live."

As real as this was, Stiles didn't believe any of it—he didn't believe this psychoward-escapee could take him into the future, or that the dispatch was really about himself. But he said, "Okay. I'll go with you."

"**S**O IT WORKS," the Acting President said.

Telzer looked up to see the now-familiar face of the AWP on his communication screen. Telzer wondered

when he was actually going to meet the great man face-to-face; they were becoming friends.

"Oh, yeah, it does," Telzer said. "At least," he went on with a frown, "most of the time. Sometimes our operatives arrive, make contact, reach agreement, activate the devices and then arrive here unaccompanied. We don't know why. There's still a lot we don't know. But," his face brightened, "so far we're about 80 percent effective."

"I didn't really expect it to do that well."

"The part of me that's me—Telzer, that is—didn't either. But the rest of me knew it would."

The AWP stepped back from the broadcaster; it followed him automatically as he walked around his littered desk. Telzer wondered for perhaps the tenth time why the Acting President's viewer was the only one which appeared to do that, but dismissed the thought as irrelevant.

"Know what I wonder?" the Acting President asked.

"What?"

"I wonder why those intelligences you've got blended inside your brain never got together and came up with this idea before—before they were implanted in you, I mean."

"Simple," Telzer explained. "Because it was really my idea. Most of them knew that time travel was theoretically possible—the same mathematics are involved in the star drive; in fact, it would be relatively easy to turn a star drive into a time-travel device. But they didn't see it as a solution. They were all, except Schiker, afraid of the paradox; Schiker was aware—or at least believed, and his theory has proven true—that the paradox wasn't possible. But he, in turn, assumed that *that* ruled it out as

a solution."

"It was *your* idea, Bruce?"

Telzer smiled wanly. "Before I went into cold sleep—before my job was automated—I was a cop. My last three years on the force, I worked in the San Francisco Missing Person's Bureau."

• • • AND HE walked around the horse. . .

TELZER HAD TWO JOBS—more than enough to keep himself busy. When he wasn't heading up the time travel task force, his intelligences were required for research work on weapons. The way things were progressing on both fronts, it would not be long before the human race would be ready to exact vengeance on the aliens.

But the work was not enough to keep him from thinking and wondering and remembering. . .

He had asked an assistant to the Acting President to check into a matter for him; the assistant had promised to call right back. Instead, a package had been delivered to Telzer's door with the information he had requested inside. From the documents therein, he learned that Suzanne E. Southerland, nee Young, and in between Suzanne E. Telzer, had never entered the cold sleep program. Her personality holograph was on file—a "copy" of her could be made, in an artificially cloned body that was not her own—but it was not the "real" Suzanne E. Telzer, in the sense that the intelligences which had been implanted into his own mind were real. Her personality had not been extracted at the moment of death, because her death had been a fluke—the kidney which had been cloned from her tissue to replace the one which was malfunctioning had been misplaced.

She had died on the operating table before the doctors realized that the mistake had been made.

The AWP's assistant called him back. "If you wish, sir, we *could* have that holograph implanted in a cloned female approximating her original appearance—"

"No," Telzer interrupted. "No, that will not be necessary."

Thereafter, Telzer threw himself into his work.

But the remembrances, both pleasant and unpleasant, were often triggered by the reading which both his jobs required—historical books, records and documents for the task force, the works of other physicists and scientists for his weapons research.

Often he would be all but completely absorbed in his task, reach up to turn a page, and his eyes would focus on his right index finger, which was missing the first joint.

That was all it took.

He had met Suzy during the San Francisco Confrontations. She was on one side, a "meatball"; he was on the other, a cop. (A few years later, there had been a Tri-D series about that—a cop who met and fell in love with a meatball. They had studiously avoided watching it.)

They had discovered, to their pleasure, that the labels meant next to nothing—he was more conservative, she more liberal—but not at first, of course.

He was a nervous young lieutenant, trying just as hard to keep his own men under control as he was to control the crowd of meatballs; she, permit in hand and more experienced in her role than he in his, was angrily confronting him as a symbol of outrageous liberal authority.

She was so strikingly beautiful—

blonde, blue-eyed, full-breasted (opaque blouse) and full-hipped (long blue dress)—that he had difficulty concentrating on the task at hand, which was simply to read her permit to ascertain that everything was in order.

Her exclamation—"What the hell?!"—alerted him. He looked up from the permit to see the madman—later, he always thought of him as 'the mad meatball'—charging in their direction out of the crowd.

The madman wore an impeccable suit, snappy black leather shoes, lots of hair, a full beard and an angry scowl. And he had something in his hand which glinted in the early morning sunlight.

Telzer found out what that something was when the meatball closed on him: a straight razor, wielded with force and expertise. Telzer instinctively threw up his hand for protection, then saw the bloody first joint of his own index finger flying through the air. The madman, whirling, scooped it up, turned to the crowd to wave it like some sort of banner or trophy, then sprinted toward an alley as a patrolman under Telzer's command fired a shot.

"Hold your fire!" Telzer yelled. The girl was wrapping her scarf around his mutilated finger, saying, "Oh, Jes, oh Christ! This wasn't planned, it wasn't planned!"

"I believe you," he said.

Then he realized that, *goddamn*, that finger *hurt*.

That had been how they had met.

She accompanied him to the hospital. Rationalizing it as his just reward for the pain he was starting to suffer, he took full advantage of her sympathies—or at least her ability to view him through the incident as a human being rather than a symbol of

authority—to find out her name, address and vid code.

So they dated.

And he "got over" the fact that she lived with a guy named Donald; she, in turn, got over the fact that he had to get over it. They enjoyed each other's company; their tastes in Tri-D, food, recreation and music were more similar than either had thought possible. She refused to talk about drugs; he, after making it clear that he would be glad to give her some if she wanted, refrained from offering them to her and only smoked a few jays on days when he saw her. Finally, he let her seduce him.

In the end, he knew why she had chosen him over Donald. It was because he had accepted her offer of marriage while Donald had not. It had not been for sex or for security or for love, although all of these fell into place as part of their considerations. Sex had been good, then better; security was there; love followed.

He was 18; she was 14.

It had not been a bad marriage. Not perfect, but not bad. They had had their ups and downs, their arguments—particularly about when they were going to have children; he wanted to wait until he made captain, she didn't. But there had also been good times aplenty. It, the marriage, had lasted seven years.

It was almost a full year after everyone had realized the full implications of what the aliens had done to the human race that he found out that she was seeing Donald again.

"Why?" he asked her.

"Because you didn't want children when we could have had them," she answered.

He sat for a moment in angry silence. "You know it wasn't that," he said. "I wanted children as much as

you did—maybe more. I just wanted to wait until we had the credit."

"Sure. We had to be 'responsible'. And so we were. And those who were irresponsible had children while we didn't—and now we can't. Of course, we can always go into that stupid cold sleep program until the problem's solved—but if you think I'm going to trust my body to that Foundation with Albert Jarrell in power, you're crazier than any meatball I ever knew. Biblically or otherwise."

"I just wanted to wait—"

"And we waited too long, didn't we?" she interrupted. When he had nothing to say to that, she said again, "Didn't we?"

"I guess," he said, his voice a whisper.

"Donald can't give me children, now, any more than you can," Suzanne said. "But he is—he always was—a better lover. Can't you see that all the things you once represented, all the things that made you better than him—your sense of responsibility, the security and depth of feeling, your position in life—can't you see that that's all meaningless now?"

He is, he always was, a better lover. The words echoed and reechoed in his brain. He realized that he should have felt angry, guessed correctly that he would feel anger later, but somehow could not bring the emotion up to be dealt with while she was looking at him.

Instead, he said quietly, "I won't give you a divorce."

"I don't need one," she said. A tear came to her eyes but she smiled.

Suzy was gone when Telzer returned home the next afternoon. He knew where she was; he called her on the vid.

"It's no good, Bruce," she said.

"You know that; I know that. It was good, but the circumstances have changed. Don't call me here."

He noticed, before she toggled off on her end, that she was smoking a jay. In all the years they had been married, she had never smoked with him. But the circumstances had changed.

He stood looking at his reflection in the silvered-over vid for a moment, not certain just what he would do. Then he went to the drawer where he kept his service repeater and a box of charges. He opened the drawer, studied the gun for a long time, then closed the drawer and walked away.

In the two weeks that followed he opened that drawer, but always closed it again, a total of 14 times. In the middle of that two-week period, his job was automated—no surprise, really; he'd been told to expect it. He closed the door to their home for the last time, put the key in an envelope which he mailed to her at Donald's conapt, and walked the 20 blocks to the nearest cold sleep program headquarters.

When he reached the "Assignment of Worldly Goods" section of the standard form, he paused for a moment. Then he wrote in, "Suzanne Eppard Telzer, Wife," and filled out the rest of the form without stopping.

THERE WAS FEAR atop-deck, apathy below.

"Are you sure?" Capt. Daniel Stefan asked the young man who stood before him.

"Absolutely," the young man replied.

Their ship was small—120 feet long, 25½ feet wide, with its gunwales only 11 feet above water. There were between 300 and 400 slaves on board.

Capt. Steffan wrung his hands fretfully. On the horizon, off the starboard bow, was yet another, larger ship. The young man, who'd sighted the other ship from the crow's nest, continued, "She bears the Jolly Roger, sir. A skeleton holding an hour glass with blood dripping from it."

The captain shuddered. "Roberts," he said, "Bartholomew Roberts. That's his Jolly Roger." He'd heard that Roberts had already taken more than 300 slave vessels; in fact, the pirate was nearing his 400th capture.

Suddenly decisive, Capt. Steffan turned and, without dismissing the lad, bellowed, "Prepare to repel invaders!" The handful of men who made up his crew looked bewildered but set about arming themselves as best they could.

The young man slipped away to the cargo hold. Looking down, he could see the miserable human cargo milking about, sitting, standing, lying down, with hardly enough room to draw a breath. Several of them were already dead—they'd been marched overland to Cape Coast Castle on the upper Guinea Gold Coast, held there by the British until a buyer appeared, and rowed to the ship by Kruman tribesmen. Some of them had never seen the ocean before; thinking the roar of the surf was some beast, they'd turned, despite the hippo-hide whips of their fellow blacks and the cat-o'-nine-tails of the British, and clawed at the sand, trying to escape. Clubbed to the ground, many of them had been dragged to the waiting canoes unconscious; no one had bothered to tend their wounds after they'd been dropped into the cargo hold.

The first cannon sounded. Roberts' ship was still too far away—the shot was intended as a warning—and the

ball splashed harmlessly in the water. But the pirate vessel was closing fast.

The young man saw that the approaching fight was occupying the crew's attention. He took the key he'd filched from the captain's cabin the night before and stooped to unlock the cargo hatch.

The next cannonball also fell short, but covered the deck of the slave ship with salty spray.

The young man saw eyes unaccustomed to sunlight looking up at him; a few were filled with hate—and rightly so, he understood—but most of the stares were still apathetic. He jumped and landed amongst them—men, women, children—without apparent harm.

The ship shuddered as the third cannonball found its intended mark and the air was filled with noxious smoke.

He walked among them, touching them—and every one he touched disappeared! They began to pull back from him, not wanting to be touched, muttering to themselves. But he kept up his work, and succeeded in sending 40 men and women to his time before Capt. Steffan shot a ball into his back.

The captain had just time enough to wonder about the unsightly spaciousness of his cargo hold when a pirate blade entered his liver.

The pirates took the cargo, muttering about its scantiness, before setting the ship afire and sending it down to Davy Jones' Locker.

"HOW LONG?" the Acting President asked Telzer.

Looking at the Acting President on his view screen, Telzer answered, "Before we can go after the aliens? Hard to say. We're particularly successful in the primitive years, as far as

bringing people up to our time is concerned—which is fine for the purpose of repopulating the race. But you can't rip a near-savage out of his time and expect him, or her, to learn something like piloting a star ship over night. We've had a little luck with a few fellas in the Bermuda Triangle area—but not enough to make a really decent start."

The Acting President rose from his desk and walked around it to his door, which he shut; the viewer followed him as he returned to his desk, opened a drawer and pulled a bottle and a glass from it.

"Hearty Burgundy," the Acting President said, "1978. I've taken the liberty of sending a bottle to you; I hope you'll join me in a bit of libation."

Telzer opened his desk drawer and found the bottle and a glass. The two of them poured and drank together. "Good year," Telzer said. "What are we celebrating?"

"Nothing. Everything. The ultimate defeat of the aliens."

"Here's to," Telzer said, taking another gulp. Remembering the subject they'd been discussing, Telzer said, "There's still a lot we don't know about time. Had to completely recalibrate the devices—according to my calculations there's a large unaccountable recent interval we can't enter into. Must be something wrong with my math. And we still don't know why we're not as effective as we could want in netting people from the relatively recent past. Sometimes that can be. . .most unfortunate."

"But you've been successful enough," the AWP said. "We have over three thousand men from the past who are capable of having children, as well as a large number of women. They'll be allowed to

marry—or not, as suits them—and have children in the usual way, but we've also set up artificial insemination banks and started cloning some of them."

"But still no hope for men like us."

"Uh, right," the AWP said. "You were married—before?"

Telzer nodded.

"I seem to recall something my assistant left me, about your former wife. If you want—"

"No," Telzer said. "She died in a freak hospital accident. They didn't get her real personality; they only have a personality holograph, taken a few years before she died."

"Oh," the AWP said. "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"It wouldn't matter anyway," Telzer said. "We broke up because we couldn't have children. Even if I could resurrect her, we still couldn't."

"Well," the Acting President said, "you can't have children of your own, but at least it's not the same as it was before. I mean, with all these women from the past, you can have relationships. . ."

Telzer nodded again. "I suppose. What about the rest of the cold sleepers? When do we start bringing them up to finish out their lives and help in the reconstruction?"

The AWP finished his drink. "Bruce," he said, "I'm tired of you hanging around here in some nebulous advisory capacity. I'm appointing you Acting Admiral of the World. You let me know when you think we're ready to go after the aliens."

"Uh, good, okay," Telzer said. He finished his drink. "What about the other cold sleepers?"

"Bruce," the AWP said, "there are no more cold sleepers. You are the only one."

Telzer sat in stunned silence for a

while. "What?"

"You are the only one."

Telzer waited. "Oh," he said after a bit. He lowered his eyes to his empty wine glass. A minute later he said, "I don't understand." He looked back up at the AWP but the AWP was no longer there.

"I'm not real either, Bruce," his viewer said, "although if it will make you feel more comfortable I can appear before you in my old form. I am just a sophisticated computer."

The image of the Acting President reappeared on the screen; he was still holding his wine glass and was now sitting on the edge of his desk, looking at Telzer with concern.

"But the people," Telzer said, "the people. . . I've met quite a few people here, even before we started bringing people up from the past. Not just viewscreen contacts, like you—real in-the-flesh people."

"Your clone brothers and sisters, Bruce—all built from your basic material, but altered to change appearances."

"I don't understand," Telzer said miserably. "What's happened? What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about what now seems to have been a grave error in human judgment long since past," the AWP said. "I'll try to explain."

Telzer could only nod.

The computer recounted how the great minds of Telzer's time had tried to find an answer but how, after several hundred years of sustained effort, it became obvious to most of those left that there was no biological solution within their grasp. They could clone—but cloning sterile males produced sterile males. They could extract intelligences from dying bodies and place them, individually or in groups, into a new body. They

could "record" intelligences in living bodies in case some freak accident killed them; their "ghosts" could be resurrected.

But they could not accept this as a permanent solution.

"There were those—at first a minority, but then a growing majority—who despaired. They said the human race had been checkmated. That there was no choice but to accept defeat," the AWP said.

There had been a lot of suicide.

After six hundred years of concentrated research, there was a group which recommended abandonment of the quest in favor of merely upsetting the aliens. Granted, they said, that the race had been checkmated. But there was a final move humanity could make—they could knock over the chessboard.

"There were those," the AWP, "who wanted to field an army of clones to smash the aliens, but they were shouted down. Most of what was left of the human race was sick and tired of living."

The Acting President paused, licked his lips, then continued: "I was constructed almost as an afterthought—as a sop to those who wanted the battle continued on some front. You were chosen, partly because you were one of many who fit the required physical and psychological dimensions and partly by random chance. I was given the means to implant the holographs of the great minds of your race into your clones and the directive to continue until a solution was found. The cold sleepers were not awakened."

"And?" Telzer asked.

"The Earth. . . was rendered useless. Destroyed. The radioactive fires will burn for at least another hundred thousand years, at which time there

will be nothing left but ashes. There were no survivors."

"Then where are we?"

"On an artificial world, revolving around a Sol-type sun, giving off no radiation of our own."

Telzer took in a deep breath, let it out slowly. "How long has it really been? Since I went into cold sleep?"

"Your clones, and I, with aid from different combinations of the great minds of your race, have been sifting for a solution for over a thousand years. It hasn't been 187 years since you went into cold sleep—it's been more like 1800."

"Eighteen—" Telzer interjected. "But that means the aliens could have died out, too—or changed so completely that they can no longer be held responsible for what they did to the human race."

The AWP nodded. "It explains that 'gap' you were talking about—not an error in your mathematics; I had to have another Schiker devise a block for that period to keep you from suspecting."

"But wait a minute," Telzer said. "What about the other intelligences which have been grafted into me—Schiker, Badecker, Crandall, Myers and all the rest? Their memories span a hundred, two hundred years—not 1800, like you say."

"They're personality holographs too, Bruce. I cut them off at a point when they were still relatively young and fresh—not old and cynical and full of despair. And I didn't want you to suspect—I was afraid it would effect your motivation and depress you."

"I'm depressed now."

The AWP ignored the comment. "One other thing. I mentioned an error in human judgment. There was also one of my own."

"Which was?"

"I only started adding *your* personality mix about a hundred years ago."

Telzer said nothing for a while. Then: "I'm one of my own clones, aren't I?"

"Yes. Constructed exactly as you had been."

Telzer straightened; as the AWP had been talking, he found that he had been slumping forward. "Tell me this," he said. "My own mind—is it really my mind, or am I just a personality holograph?"

"You must understand," the AWP said, "the holographs were so much easier to store. And there was no thought, when I was constructed, of using the . . . lesser minds."

"Oh, Christ," Telzer said. "*I'm not real!*" He felt a shudder run down his back and slumped forward in his chair again to bury his face in his hands.

"Bruce," the AWP said, coming forward so that only his face filled the screen, "what's 'real'? You are really the person you are—it's just that the 'real' Bruce Telzer—so-called—is now part of the radioactive debris that was once called Earth. You're more real than he is, now—you live, breath, walk, talk, think, while he's dead."

Telzer straightened up; it would take time, but already he knew that he would be able to accept what he was—because he would have to. "I'm a ghost, both mentally and physically. And since I'm constructed of the same faulty material, I'm really the *only* sterile male left. Right?"

The Acting President gnawed at his lower lip, stammered. But then he said, "For all practical purposes, that is correct."

"God damn you!"

Of Bruce wants another toss in the hay, Samantha thought.

Sitting here with him in his Lower East Side pad, smoking grass and listening to the new Dylan, she wondered whether she should give him what he wanted. She decided that she would if she felt like it, and right now—if he didn't do anything to spoil her mood—she felt like it.

She had liked Bruce ever since he'd more or less attached himself to her group of friends. Even if he was older than most of them, he grew his own super grass, was never stingy, liked the right music, was incredibly gentle in bed (although she wasn't sure if she should continue to believe his claim that he was sterile) and always seemed to know where good vibes were to be found.

"You know your father's looking for you, don't you Sam?" Telzer said to her.

She sat up on the sofa on which she'd been reclining. Seductively. "Know it? Yeah, I know it—that's why I have to split this scene for the coast."

Telzer sighed. Originally, he had come here for some relaxation—and shared pleasure. But something had happened between himself and this girl. She looked, for one thing, much as Suzanne had looked during the last years of their marriage. Young though Sam was, he had wanted her enough to check out her background. Yet now that he had done that and it seemed possible that he might be able to take her with him, he wasn't all that sure that he wanted to nor, if he did, how to explain it to her without sounding like a madman.

Fortunately, she seemed to have an uncommon appreciation of his madder aspects. Unlike Suzanne.

"Suz—uh—Sam," he said at last, "I know you've told a number of people that you're leaving the Village for the

Haight. But what if I told you that I know you'll never get there?"

"How do you know? Do you have a Sight?"

Telzer, in his short acquaintance with Samantha, had inadvertently 'predicted' a few things; she had assumed him to be a mystic of sorts, and he had done nothing to dissuade her from that belief.

"Yeah," Telzer said, "I guess you could say that. I know what lies ahead. And I'm telling you that if you make the right choice and come with me, you can live life as you've always wanted to."

"What do you see for me, if I come with you?"

"I see a trip—but not a trip through space," he said. "A trip through time—past tomorrow and into the future—to a world where no one will want you to be anything but what you are, a beautiful young woman. A place where the only laws are that people try to love, rather than hurt, one another. I really want you to come with me, Sam."

At first she had thought he was only kidding—setting her up for some novel approach, some new line to get her into bed.

"You're not kidding, are you?"

"No," Telzer said. "I'm not."

"You mean, like, legal pot and all that?"

"That too."

"Sounds too good to be true. How do I get there from here?"

Telzer said, "I'll take you. If I can."

Either Bruce tries to put the make on me right now, she thought, or something really weird is about to happen.

Telzer held out his hand. She reached out to touch him—and then almost jumped out of her skin when he vanished, pop!, just like that. One

second he was standing there reaching out to take her hand, the next he was gone.

But then he was standing across the room again.

"Hey," Samantha said, "I don't know what this is all about—"

"I'm sorry, Sam," he said. "Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. We don't understand just why. I thought—"

"Hey, man. Just let me out of here. Okay? Just let me out."

Telzer sighed. "The door's not locked. You're free to go."

"Right," she said. She walked to the door, tested it to make sure it would really open before she said, "I liked you. I think you're some sort of weird cat, but I liked you. I wish I knew what you just did or tried to do. Some sort of put-on? Some sort of goof? But why me? I thought you liked me, too—"

"Goodbye, Sam," Telzer said—and disappeared for the second and last time.

"Oh, man," she whispered. "Oh, wow. I always thought that stuff about LSD wasn't true."

TELZER went back to work, designing super weapons and talking to the AWP/computer.

But his heart wasn't really in it.

Even if his 'vacation' had been brief, he'd had such hopes for Sam. . .

She had really liked him. He had liked—perhaps loved—her. And he was certain that she would have continued to like him, perhaps even to love him, had he been able to bring her forward to his own time. His sterility wouldn't matter to her—he'd told her, back then, that he was sterile and it hadn't mattered then. Not to her.

"But if you'd succeeded in bringing her forward," the machine said, "she might have changed. She was, after all, very much a product of her environment. Change the environment and you would almost certainly change her."

"Get off my back," Telzer said.

"When will we be outfitting for star drive? When will we be going out to seek the enemy?"

"Get off my back," Telzer said. He threw his pencil down on the floor. "I know—I'm behaving like a child. You can do the rest without me. Just leave me alone with my problem."

The viewscreen dimmed and the image of the Acting President disappeared. Telzer retrieved his pencil from the floor, then sank back into his chair. The silence was deafening. Finally he said, "Hey, machine."

The viewscreen, showing no visage, said, "Yes?"

"I think I see now why you won't—or can't—go on without me. You're attuned to me, right?"

The screen let out an audible sigh. "Yes. Yes, I am attuned to you."

"Fine. Fine. You do what I say, when I say it, not before, right?"

"Correct."

"Good," Telzer said. He broke his pencil. "Assuming they still exist, we have everything we need to go up against the aliens—lasers that can focus the power of a sun on the head of a pin, missiles that exceed the speed of light to invoke the Einsteinian law and punch a hole in the fabric of space that can swallow planets whole, nova-bombs. . . We're just lacking one thing."

"What?"

"My say-so. And I'm not going to say so until my own personal problem is solved."

The Acting President appeared on

the screen. "Bruce," he said, "there's no answer. Believe me. We—that is, your race and your clone brothers and I—have tried for close to two thousand—"

"Look," Telzer interrupted, pointing a finger accusingly at the screen, "As far as I can figure it, I was chosen for this task because I'm the kind of person I am—because I take what the aliens did to the whole human race *personally*. You're goddamn right I do. If you can't find a solution. . . a solution. . ." Telzer's eyes focused on the finger he was pointing at the AWP and his voice drifted off. He licked his lips. "Machine, answer me: If I wanted to transfer myself into another clone body, I could do it, couldn't I?"

"Yes," the AWP said. "But it wouldn't change anything. We'd have to make the clone from your tissue—and your tissue is, of course, sterile at the chromosomic level."

"Just you get set up for the operation, or transference, or whatever it is. I'll provide the tissue."

"Of course! We've been bringing virile males up from the past. You can use *their* tissue! Of course!"

"It would work," Telzer said, "but it's not what I had in mind."

IT HAD TAKEN MONTHS of preparation, and now the crowd was gathering. The green-coats were doing everything they could to hold the people back, but the crowd was too large and they weren't having any of it.

They followed the fourteen-year-old blonde who was waving a piece of paper over her head. They chanted their slogans at the top of their lungs, knowing they were many and strong and right, throwing fright into the young green-coat who was trying not to show it as he made his way towards

them and her.

Telzer, in the midst of the group, checked his step; the new shoes he had purchased were too tight for his feet and he wasn't used to wearing these late 20th century suits any longer.

The young girl turned, holding up both her hands, indicating that the throng should halt. It did. She smiled at the people—she knew most, but not all of them—and then turned to march out and confront the young green-coat.

Telzer ran a hand over his beard and checked his suit coat pocket. Yes, he still had it.

The girl and the green-coat were shouting at each other now.

With a yell, Telzer forced his way out of the crowd and began to run in the direction of the girl and the cop.

The girl looked in Telzer's direction and she said something to the green-coat who looked up from the paper she had given him to read. But it was already too late—Telzer was on top of them, an angry scowl on his face, wielding the straight razor he'd pulled from his pocket. The green-coat threw up his hand and the blade sliced through a finger, sending the first joint flying through the air.

Whirling, Telzer scooped the finger joint from the ground, turned to the crowd to wave it at them—and to get one last glance at Suzanne—then sprinted away.

A shot rang out and he heard the green-coat yell, "Hold your fire!"

Then Telzer was in the alley. He activated his time-travel device and disappeared.

NEW EARTH spat up angry ships into the ebon heavens and beyond; the starmada, after so long a time, after so much work, formed and

grouped, dropped into star drive together and jumped for the nearest stars.

"I almost feel sorry for the aliens," the new Telzer said to the AWP. "The more I think about it, the more I'm sure they didn't realize that what they did to us was at the very heart of what we humans consider a low blow."

"Don't feel *too* sorry for them," the Acting President said.

"Maybe after we're done," Telzer said. "Maybe then. But not before. I've suffered—let them suffer. Yea, even unto the twentieth generation, if needs be."

"I hate them as much as you do, Bruce."

"Can a machine hate?"

"If it's been programmed by humans who hate, yes. And I was."

"I don't like to think about what our starmada will do to them when they find them," Telzer said.

"Me either," the AWP agreed, "part of the time, anyway. The rest of the time, I'm enjoying the thoughts too much."

The ships jumped from star to star, sending back reports, sometimes finding other lifeforms and sometimes not—but always searching for the Enemy.

And then the Enemy was found.

THE STARMADA was pulling back before the advance of the Enemy, who demonstrated time and again that they could handle anything and everything the Earthmen cared to throw at them.

All these ships with their fancy hardware, Craig Hughes thought, and it's like we was playin' with toys as far as the bugs are concerned.

He didn't know why he thought of the aliens as 'bugs'—no one had ever

seen an alien—but he hated bugs and he hated aliens, and that was enough.

Hughes was not afraid to die—indeed, the time traveller had come to him when he had been on the verge of jumping into the East River. Now, he figured, his death would matter—it might accomplish something.

He was adrift, his engines cut, coasting along on accumulated speed amidst a small swarm of space debris. He bit his fingernails, hoping the debris would conceal him enough. Although he knew it didn't matter, he tried to sit without moving in his seat. His muscles were tired and cramped and his eyes ached and he wished now that he had listened to that medirobot when it had suggested he use the cream that permanently removed facial hair; his three-day growth itched intollerably. The recycled air, too, was bringing back more and more of his body sweat.

Smells like a men's locker room, Hughes thought.

The silence of just drifting was more deafening than the powerful roar of the stardrive had been. Now he could see points of light, the aliens, heading in his direction. He was almost convinced that he had not been detected—nothing had been allowed to get this close before.

Who knows, he began to think, maybe I'll get me one of them bug ships yet.

Now the ships began to look more like starcraft than points of light in his forward screens—and, as he calculated the distance, he began to realize how truly massive the alien vessels really were. Hughes held his breath—more reaction than logic—and counted seconds. Soon, soon he would have one close enough in his forward sights, and then he could

send a missile through it at near-light speed.

Now! His thumb jerked forward. . . . and he was back with the starmada. The missile shot forward and exploded harmlessly in deep space.

"WE'RE retreating?" the AWP asked.

Telzer said, "When our ships tried to go around, we found that their fleet was much larger than we expected. There's no 'around'. There's only back. And it's not back to the old Earth that they're being pushed—they're being forced back *here*."

"Not a damned casualty," the Acting President said, "and we're still losing."

"We've tried everything we can think of. When they neutralized the sun bombs, one of our ships tried a suicide—direct into a nearby unstable star at near-light speed to induce a nova. The aliens just teleported it back to the starmada, like some incredible chess referee deciding that the move wasn't permissible under the rules."

"And there's not a damned thing we can do about it," the Acting President said bitterly.

"Not necessarily," Telzer said. "Bring the starmada home and outfit them for time-travel. Then we can send the ships back to a time when we *can* fight them."

On the viewscreen, the AWP could be seen considering it. "Can't work. At least, if your theories about changing the space-time continuum are correct—and they've fairly well proved themselves. The aliens exist now—therefore we cannot have beaten them at some earlier time."

"Well, I think I can see a way around that—and I *know* I can't think of anything else to do. If you don't

want to try it, I can resign as Acting Admiral and let someone else have a go at it."

Telzer's exasperation was visible—not exasperation at the AWP's objections but exasperation at the AWP in general. For close to a month, Telzer had found himself meeting scores of young, blonde-haired women at his work. They had all been friendly and agreeable—and they had all been sent to him by the AWP.

The Acting President said, "I must really be alive—otherwise I wouldn't be motivated by self-preservation. Have it your way. Don't explain anything. We're of the unanimous opinion that the starmada should be returned to New Earth at once."

NEW EARTH was far behind. Telzer waited until the walking extension of the AWP—a view scanner on wheels—was in position before selecting the date he wanted: November 3, 1993.

"Back to the day of infamy," the Acting President remarked. "I don't see how it can possibly do any good."

Telzer, no longer feeling resentment toward the AWP now that he had kept the machine in the dark for so long, said, "We can't stop them from following that starship back to Earth, if that's what you're thinking. Nor can we stop them from dropping the spore—it's too firmly fixed. If the spore never reached old Earth, then Earth males were never sterilized, I never went into cold sleep, we never built time-travel devices, we never came back and prevented them from dropping it, therefore they dropped it, therefore—well, in a word, paradox."

Telzer activated the mechanism which sent the starmada backwards in

time—back to 1993, back to the eleventh month and third day, back to the hour and minute of the aliens' arrival.

"I don't get it then," the AWP said.

"Now the hard part," Telzer said, ignoring the mobile extension. "We sit and watch and do nothing."

The alien fleet flashed into existence outside the orbit of Neptune, their sensors tuned toward Io Base, Luna, Mars Colony and Earth—unaware of the starmada behind them. When the aliens fired the spore, Telzer spoke into the microphone which connected him to the other ships in his fleet. "They're all ours! Kill the goddamn bastards!"

The alien fleet flashed out of existence—not jumping back to their home worlds, as Earth's scientists were later to believe, but burned under the awesome weaponry of the starmada. The alien ships were sliced, burned, exploded, frozen and disintegrated; missiles exploded into them, lasers and rays cut hunks out of them; and the aliens inside were burned, frozen, asphyxiated, decapitated, shot, rent asunder and exposed to the wastes of space—all in an interval of a few short seconds.

"Leave that radioactive debris," Telzer commanded, "and let's get the hell out of here."

And so the starmada made a long jump and came to rest.

THE MOBILE extension of the AWP was saying, "We'll hunt them down, worlds at a time. We won't leave one of them alive."

Telzer nodded agreement.

The Acting President sighed. "And when the blood-letting stops, we'll have time to ask ourselves whether what we've done was right. As usual with our race, it'll be too late to do anything about it if it's wrong."

Telzer rubbed his face with his hands and laughed; it amused him that the AWP kept including itself as part of the human race. But he said, "And then what—have you thought at all about that?"

"Why, we go back to our own time, of course."

"Wrong," Telzer said. "Unless we want to meet whoever that was who was chasing us halfway across the galaxy."

"That's right," the AWP said. "I was so caught up in our success against the alien fleet that I'd forgotten about them. Who were they, anyway? They couldn't have been the aliens—unless we're fated not to destroy them all."

"I'll give you a hint if you'll promise to stop throwing women at me."

The walking extension of the Acting President made a sound that was half way between a whirr and a sigh. "I was only trying to help, Bruce—"

"I know. I'd rather help myself. You want that hint?"

"You have my promise."

"It doesn't have to be a 'them'."

"If it's not a 'them'," the AWP said, "it would have to be 'us'."

"Right."

"I said that on pure word logic," the Acting President admitted, "but I don't think I understand it."

"It's simple," Telzer said. "We can't tamper with the fabric of time—we know that, and yet, from what we've just done, it seems that we've changed something of our future. Therefore, we have to resolve it."

"But the only thing we have to change is what we've been changing all along, namely, how we choose to see things. This will take some doing, but we have all the time we need. Our engineers know what our weapons are—given time, they should be able to come up with devices that

can detect our type of ship and teleport them out of harm's way before they can do anything. We know what each and every one of our ships did, or tried to do, in that mock-battle, and what the other side's response was. We have to tool up so that we can do to ourselves, in that future time, what the other side did. We either have to *become* the other side or eventually face an enemy who is actually capable of all of those things. I think the choice is obvious."

The AWP started to say something but stopped. "Well," he said at last, "I guess we'd better get some of our engineers working on it."

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN some time later. It also might have been some time earlier. It would depend, of course, on how one saw things. In objective terms, however, it was both later and earlier.

The young orderly was very tired; he was into the second hour of his second consecutive shift and it really irritated him to see the older man, wearing orderly's garb, just lounging around while he had to push this wagon down to the lab.

So he stopped to look the older man over. True, he'd never seen the man before—but that was hardly unusual, considering San Francisco General's size. His irritation increased when he saw that the man was smoking.

"Hey, idiot," he said, "put that goddamned thing out."

"Huh?"

"That cigarette. Put it out. Don't you know they've got oxygen tanks around here?"

"Uh, no," the other man said, man-aging to look sheepish. "I'm sorta new here." The older man looked around for an ash tray. Failing to find one, he

knocked the burning tip off the end of his cigarette, stepped on it and placed the butt in his shirt pocket.

"You got nothing to do," the young orderly said, still piqued, "you can wheel this cart down to the lab—they need it for a 10:30 operation. You *do* know where that is, don't you?"

"Sure." The man took the cart by the handles and started pushing it down the hallway.

The orderly, apparently satisfied, decided he needn't supervise—that, after all, might be carrying things a bit too far. And, besides, he needed a cigarette. When the older man had pushed the cart around the corner and was out of sight, he lit up, shook his head and wondered aloud, "Is this any way to run a hospital?"

The thought of theft—much less his own culpability—just never occurred to him. After all, who in his right mind would want to steal some lady's cloned kidney? What possible use could he find for it?

The answer to that would depend, of course, on how one saw things.

SHE ACCEPTED IT all calmly and matter-of-factly—what she was, and everything that had gone before—much as he had accepted other intelligences in his mind such a long time ago.

When he finished his explanations, she asked simply, "Now what?"

He sat down opposite her, taking in all the details of her face and body. "I don't really know," he answered at last. "I thought it might be a solution—for me, anyway. But now I'm not so sure."

"What, in life, is 'sure'?"

He shrugged. "Nothing, I guess."

There was silence between them. Then she said, "I felt guilty for a long time after you went into the program.

I held you responsible for something that wasn't really your fault."

He shrugged again. "In a way, it was a good thing."

"Oh?"

"I'm sure it was one of the reasons the computer chose me—because I felt so personally resentful. If the computer hadn't chosen me, neither of us would be here now."

She looked down at her hands, spread her fingers. "We loved each other—or the people we're just shadows of loved each other. But I'm not the woman you know—I, or 'she', lived another five years before that personality holograph was taken."

"I'm not the same man, either—don't forget, I've lived and changed a

bit, too."

She looked up, into his eyes. "I think they loved each other a great deal. Despite everything."

"Do you really feel like a shadow—like a ghost?"

"No," she said. "No, I don't. I feel real."

"I don't feel like a ghost or a shadow, either." He paused. "I don't know if it would work for us, now—but, like you just said, what in life is certain?"

She smiled—and it was a smile which he remembered. "Bruce," she said, "how do shadows make love?"

He returned the smile.

"Like this," he said.

—RICH BROWN

Editorial (cont. from page 87)

which underscores the unfair treatment which New York City receives.

The issue of *Newsweek* for November 10th features on its cover a cartoon-sculpture (by Robert V. Engle, who once did stf magazine covers. . .) of President Ford spanking NYC Mayor Beame. The headline is "Ford and New York." The cover story details Ford's position: basically one equated with the attitude of the Midwest, that New York is a Bad Place and richly deserves "discipline."

But in a front-of-the-book feature, *On Scene*, we read a different story, under the headline, "Midas Touch."

This article tells the story of John Henry Moss, mayor of Kings Mountain, North Carolina. Kings Mountain, we're told, is a small town of 9,000 people. (New York City has a population of just under eight million.) But

Mayor Moss has "the golden touch" for "taking a Federal grant application and turning it into millions of dollars." Doing nothing illegal—simply devoting himself to reading the fine print—Mayor Moss has brought \$16 million dollars to Kings Mountain in the past ten years. His most recent acquisition: \$4,160,000 in Federal aid earmarked for "thirteen projects ranging from urban beautification to child-care programs and aid for the aged and handicapped."

My question is this: Why hasn't Ford attacked this kind of reliance upon the "Federal Teat" instead of New York City's distress? Can it be because tax dollars from New York City are being funnelled into grants like these all over the country to the "hinterlands" where Ford hopes his political strength lies?

—TED WHITE

Thomas Monteleone's last appearance here was "A Creature of Accident" (March, 1975). Of the story which follows he says that it is part of a series of tales about the City of Chicago, eventually to be published as a novel, The City on the Edge of Time. Other published stories in this series are "Chicago" (Future City) and "Breath's a Ware That Will Not Keep" (Dystopian Visions). Herein we meet an emissary of the city and find him a—

GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

PEERING INTO the scope of the weapon, Denek increased the magnification until the lead vehicle filled the sight. From his perch in the high-walled rock-face, he had a clear view of the intruders.

"Computer," he said into his throat mike.

There was a humming sound in his helmet as the small terminal on his backpack reacted: "Yes," said the sexless voice.

"Send this to Chicago: I've found the intruders, and I'm going to intercept. Also check for any new orders."

"Very well," said the machine, as it clicked off the helmet channel. Several seconds passed as it communicated with the City. Denek waited, while watching the three vehicles advance deeper into the valley below him.

"Denek," the computer finally said. "Chicago confirms contact. Intercept. Confirm kill. And return. That is all."

Alone with his thoughts once more,

he prepared to attack. Why do they keep coming? he wondered, as he drew a bead on the first trac. He rested his forearm and glove on the boulder and squeezed the trigger.

Bright blue light pulsed from his weapon streaking into the valley below. The first struck immediately in front of the vehicle, but the second lanced the dome like a needle piercing a soap bubble. His scope was filled with flame, so bright that Denek was forced to look away.

In that instant, the remaining tracs broke formation and rushed to the face of the cliff nearest him. Realizing their tactics, Denek jumped up and scurried along the ridge to get a better shot. As he stepped out into the open, the computer's voice crackled in his helmet: "I am picking up a sensor beam. It just passed over you. They have detected you on the first sweep."

He leaped back from the edge of the cliff as the words trailed off. He

was wearing a man-amplification rig, giving him cat-like agility and the strength of many men. It was a series of steel rods and artificial joints, fitted to his body like an exoskeleton. The computer on his back was plugged into the man-amp rig. Myoelectric sensors picked up each movement and passed it along to the computer; the movements were then coordinated and amplified. Denek preferred the rig to any kind of vehicle: it was small and compact, the gloves were actually gauntlets with retractable tools and weapons, and it also contained bio-connectors which fed his body nutrients and drugs, keeping him ever alert and able to do battle.

An explosion pulverized the edge of the cliff where he had been standing. The convoy's armament was more sophisticated than he had imagined. He remembered the last intercept mission—three vehicles, no large armaments: it had been an easy kill.

Quickly he began scrambling over the rocks. Two more explosions ripped into the rock behind him as he scuttled away. He felt foolish, allowing himself to be discovered so easily. He had had the element of surprise, and lost it.

Several minutes passed as he climbed and leaped down the wall of the mesa. He hoped to circle around and engage the two tracs on the valley floor. He instructed the computer to continue monitoring for sensor sweeps and began to creep around the wall of the cliff.

The first vehicle was within one hundred meters of him when he entered the valley. He held up both gauntlets and fired. The pulses ripped into the vehicle, but seemed to be absorbed into it like smoke being sucked into a fan. They were using



shields, absorbing the energy and converting it to additional power for the shield itself. Denek turned and ran from his position as the trac wheeled on its treads and started trundling after him. Its turbine engines emitted a high whine as it accelerated, kicking up rooster tails of the desert sand.

The man-amp rig picked up his movements and soon he was zig-zagging across the sand at almost 80 kph. Laser pulses burst around him, vitrifying the sand into glazed pools. He had no shield and he was terribly vulnerable in the open.

The second vehicle began circling around to his left, and the two tracs attempted a pincer movement—each one slowly curving in to his center. As he ran, he retracted the laser and extended a mortar. The only way to penetrate the shield was with a solid projectile. Reaching the far end of the valley, he leaped behind a pile of boulders, gaining several seconds of cover. He placed the mortar on automatic trajectory and let the computer select the azimuth. Agonizing seconds passed as the preparations were completed. He could hear the clanking of the machinery growing closer and closer, filling his helmet with the sounds of death.

His extended hand trembled as the shell was fired. As he exhaled, he heard the explosion, and he jumped out into the open and fired a quick pulse of energy into the stricken trac. It blossomed into orange death, spreading a pollen of twisted metal across the sand. Turning on the second machine, still farther away, he saw it quickly reversing its direction, heading for an outcropping of rock to his left. He knew immediately that they wished some cover of their own, and he used the time to reassess the

situation.

Several minutes passed after the trac disappeared behind the rocks. Possibly the crew was getting out to hunt him on foot, trying to surround his position. He alerted the computer to the possibility and instructed it to enlarge the sensor sweep to include organics.

"Can you get a trajectory on that thing?" he asked as several more minutes passed in silence.

"Negative. The distance is too great."

"No organic readings?"

"Negative."

Just then the face of the cliff above him began to erupt under a barrage of fire. The trac laced the ledge above him with several shots and thousands of tons of rock starting falling towards him. He leaped instinctively from his huddling place. An ordinary man would have been crushed before taking more than a few steps; but the man-amp rig responded and he cleared the cascade of rock by many meters.

Out in the open again, he drew new fire from the trac, which had wheeled out from its hiding place. Once again he had to run, accelerating, increasing the distance between himself and the slower machine. There was no opportunity to use the mortar on the run, so he retracted it and extended the lasers once more. Turning back over his shoulder he saw the trac several kilometers behind him; he had escaped. The wind sailed over him, sending grains of sand up to tick against his faceplate.

"Is it still coming?" he checked with the computer.

"Yes. But it seems to be falling back."

He continued his accelerated pace, wondering what the creatures in the

tracs must be thinking of him. Surely they were amazed at his speed and power, realizing that they were fighting more than just a man. Denek smiled to himself at the thought.

When he had increased the distance to over five kilometers, he slowed and stopped to survey the surroundings. He had been forced out of the natural valley into a flat open stretch of desert. The trac behind him was now just a black speck shimmering in the hot atmosphere.

"The vehicle has stopped," the computer said.

"Stopped? You sure?"

"There is no movement."

Denek put the rig into a rest position. He flipped down the goggles and brought the trac into focus. It remained still; he could see no one. They were both out of range of each other, yet their movements were obvious to one another. The game of waiting began, and Denek was content to wait them out.

Minutes stretched into hours. The desert sun, ever clearly visible through the thick, half-poisoned atmosphere, sank deeper into the gray mist near the horizon. Denek replaced lost nutrients and eliminated wastes from his body. He was refreshed and eager to continue the battle.

Night came, changing the colorless sand into a blue sea of stillness, and Denek switched to infra-red as he continued to watch the vehicle. He wondered about the creatures inside it, plotting and figuring, wishing him destroyed.

He took an injection of sleep serum which rejuvenated him, even though he remained awake. His mind churned over the events of the day. He replayed the kills, smiling inwardly as he congratulated himself on

his inventiveness and instinctive actions.

He wanted to finish this last one and return home. He missed the protective shell of the City, wrapped around him and the others like a great cocoon. It was incredible that anyone would wish to destroy Chicago. It was so un-natural to him, he could not understand.

What type of beings were the intruders? The question emerged slowly in his simple brain. Never seen, they were only known as an invading force that occasionally appeared on Chicago's warning screens. Perhaps he would someday learn more about them.

But now he sat, waiting for the last of their vehicles to make its move. He could not fail, or Chicago would be threatened. The computer continued to scan the area, ready to warn him of any movement. The night wore itself out and the dawn approached.

Which was when they chose to attack.

He stood up in the man-amp rig, flexing and testing the extensors and weapons modules.

"They have dropped off two of their number," said the computer as the trac sped toward him.

"Where're they headed?"

"Spreading out. To both sides of you."

"Watch them. I'm going to take on the trac first."

Before either of them were in range, the trac opened up with laser cannon and it was effective. The pulses of energy striking the sand in front of him threw up a screen of debris, obscuring his vision. He set up the mortar and programmed the computer to zero in as soon as it came within range. The laser pulses began to creep closer to him. He stood his

ground, waiting.

Suddenly the mortar coughed out its first missile and he quickly reloaded and it fired again. The first one exploded to the right of the trac, but the second shell pierced the defensor shield, ripping the left tread to pieces. Helplessly spinning, the trac was an easy target. He extended his arm and fired three rapid bursts into it and it disappeared in a bright orange fireball.

He ran, dodging, and skipping toward the two intruders on foot, being wary of their weapons. The one closest to him opened up first, anticipating his movements.

One of the bursts burned past Denek, passing through the steel rods of the rig on his left forearm. The heat of the contact seared his skin, causing it to ripple like chicken flesh. Pain washed over his senses and his hand and wrist were inoperative. They were locked into the gauntlet of the rig and he could not move them. He had the computer inject him with something to block the pain.

Still running toward the intruder who had wounded him, he raised his good arm and fired. Several bursts missed before he cut him in half.

Seeing the fate of his companion, the other intruder pulled back and started running from Denek. He stood watching as the figure dove for cover behind the smoking husk of the vehicle. Denek fired a quick pulse of energy into the wreck and it exploded once more. In the midst of the shrapnel rain that followed, he saw the body of the intruder bouncing and rolling across the sand.

"Computer. Contact Chicago. Confirm kill. I'm coming back."

The computer hummed as it followed instructions. Denek rubbed an enzyme ointment over his burned

forearm, being careful not to touch the still glowing tips of the steel rods.

Just as he was about to turn away from the wreckage, he noticed the last intruder move slightly. It was incredible that a person could have survived the concussion, he thought, and he was impressed with the creature's toughness. He raised his weapon to finish him off, but stopped, as an odd thought struck him. He had never seen one of the intruders up close. No one ever had. The only thing he knew about them was that they were treacherous, murderous beings who would destroy the City if given the opportunity. Denek had learned everything he knew from Chicago, but now considered the chance to learn something for himself. Perhaps he would even be rewarded if he could discover something new about the intruders?

He lowered the weapon and flipped down the telescopic goggles on his helmet. He saw the crumpled figure, weaponless, one hand grasping at the hot sand, attempting to move, but failing. An organic sweep by the computer indicated a low ebb of life forces. Denek flipped up the goggles and selected a slow jog, heading toward the body. He wondered what sort of creature he would find. Anticipating the worst, he kept his weapon ready in case the computer's readings were not wholly accurate.

As he stood over the figure, his shadow fell across it, giving it a darker, more foreboding appearance. Denek huddled down, extended steel fingers, and grabbed the creature's shoulder, rolling it over, face upwards.

It was human.

Young. Feminine. Denek drew back his hand and stood up. Confused, almost disappointed that he

didn't find something else, he felt his hands shaking slightly within the gauntlets. He had never imagined that they would be like himself. Chicago had never suggested that it might be so.

To him, the intruders had always been faceless creatures attempting to destroy the City. But now, something did not fit into place. He turned over the alternatives, the possibilities. There were things he wished to know; he could not yet destroy the female.

He looked down at her again, noticing that she was barely conscious, with several deep cuts on one arm and shoulder. He tore off a piece of her jumpsuit, wiping up the sand-caked blood, and tying it over the arm. Her face was light, unburned from the fierce sun; there were several wisps of blonde hair along the edge of her helmet. Long eyelashes. Full lips. Sharp features. Angular, giving her an unusual quality of not being pretty, but somehow attractive anyway.

Several minutes passed as he stared down at her. His pulse quickened as he noticed her eyelids move slightly. He shook her and her lips parted as she gasped for breath.

"Where're you from?" he asked.

No answer.

Denek kicked her. "Speak. Where are you from?"

Keeping her eyes closed, wincing from the blow, she spoke slowly: "The City of Angels."

Denek laughed. "I want the truth. . . there is only *one* City."

"I'm telling the truth." There was no fear in her voice nor in her expression as she opened her eyes to see Denek towering over her.

"Where is this 'City' you say you come from?"

"A long way from here. We rode

for many days."

"There is only one City." Denek said confidently.

Neither spoke for several seconds before she asked: "Why do you want to kill us?"

"Because you're intruders," said Denek, almost laughing at the absurdity of her question.

"Intruders'? What do you mean?"

"You approach the City. That can't be done."

"We only wanted to contact your people and—"

"You wish to destroy us," said Denek sharply.

"No! That's not true."

"You're lying," he said, but somewhere in his simple mind, he was not so sure. She spoke with an inherent honesty in her voice.

"Look, I'm telling you. . . all we wanted to do was contact your city. . . see how you had survived." Her voice grew stronger as she began to shake off the effects of the explosion. Denek marvelled at her toughness, in spite of her frail appearance.

"Explain what you mean." His curiosity grew in spite of his instructions and training.

"There were stories. . . legends, I guess, that there were other places like our own. Once in a while men went looking. They didn't find much, but the stories continued. Some of the parties that came out this way never returned, so we came to check it out."

Her words seemed to be true to him, at least the part about other groups of intruders. He knew this because it was he who had destroyed some of them.

"They were unarmed," she added.

This was also true. Denek remembered how easy it had been to pick them off. He nodded.

"You?" she questioned, noticing his affirmation.

"Yes. It's my duty. Chicago demands it."

"You sound like the city's alive," she smiled weakly.

"It is. Chicago tells us all we need to know."

She didn't answer, continuing to stare into his eyes. Her gaze was uncomfortable and he was forced to say more: "Chicago is the giver and taker of life. Without him, we are nothing."

"Like a god or something," she said softly. She paused, biting her lower lip. "Well, I see. . . I'm sorry. . . I didn't know all that. Forgive me, please."

Denek didn't understand her, especially the odd word she used: *forgive*. He almost asked her about it, but somehow he was intimidated by her. It was an odd feeling, since he could crush her skull beneath his steel glove in an instant. Yet he could sense the power, the assuredness within her.

Several minutes passed in silence before she spoke again: "What're you going to do with me?"

Her words jarred him. She was so direct, so open. "I. . . don't know. I have been ordered to kill. . . *all* of you."

She looked over to the burned-out trac. "Yes, I know. You're very efficient."

Her words would normally have been a great compliment, but somehow they sliced into him. The female was so utterly helpless and yet she was not. He could not kill her.

Seeds of uncertainty were sprouting within him.

"Perhaps Chicago would be interested in seeing you."

She smiled. "From what you've told me, I'm not so sure."

"Explain."

"Don't you think it's kind of funny that we can talk with each other?"

Denek considered the question, his slow mind churning over the words. If she was truly alien, how could he talk to her?

"That's simple," he said haltingly. "Your people. . . they've learned our tongue. . . to deceive us. . . to lull—"

She laughed.

Denek understood her disarming reaction: "I'm wrong?"

"If we can't even get close to Chicago, how could we learn your tongue?"

She had a point, he thought. "Still, there must be a reason. Chicago would know."

"Oh, I'm sure he does. . ." she said grinning, looking more desirable than ever. "But I don't think he wants to tell *you*."

"What do you mean? Tell me."

And she did.

The desert burned away the hours as she recounted the recent history of her city. She told him of the older times when the men who had built the cities had actually controlled them, of how the cities were once swollen with humanity and of how men fought amongst themselves, killing and maiming each other. She told him of the drugs, of how the men who controlled their city learned to control the men within it by pumping drugs and enzymes into the drinking water, releasing spores into the contained atmosphere. She told him of how her ancestors had rebelled and overcome the controls, taking away the power of their city, returning control into the hands of men. Her city functioned to serve her; not the converse. Denek challenged her many times, seeking clarification of a word or an idea, but always she had the correct, logical answers. Her logic was

unavailable. Heresy, yes. But, still he could not help but almost believe her.

He dressed her wounds and gave her some of his rations. She refused to use any of his drugs, saying that they were not part of her culture. He deferred, attempting to understand everything he could about her.

As night came, wrapping them in the sudden coolness of the blue sand, they huddled closer together. Their talk drifted away from the cities and the ideas and the laws by which they lived. Instead they talked about themselves. He told her of his years of training in the Information Retrieval Centers, of his service in the military, of his years of being alone. She told him of her own years, of freedom and of curiosity. She had been free to learn and love and live. Denek was aware of this freedom she spoke of; it permeated her entire being. Her speech was clear and precise. Each word seemed to be carefully selected, yet she spoke without hesitation.

He felt clumsy and awkward as he sat by her in his rig.

Later, they prepared to sleep, and he watched her take off her helmet, stretching out on the sand. Her long hair danced lightly in the breeze. He reached down and released the pins of his ankle joints in the rig until he was free of the device. She sat watching him in the darkness, silent and waiting.

"You aren't supposed to do that, are you? Remove it, I mean."

"No, he said. 'I'm not.'"

"But you want me, don't you?" Her voice was calm and controlled as always.

He inwardly thanked her for breeching the subject. Although he had never lacked a particular kind of

warrior elan for such things, he sensed that it might be different with her.

He nodded and moved toward her.

He noticed her bandages. "Can you?" he said, his voice oddly uneven and sounding alien to himself.

She smiled and nodded. Then, lying back, she took him.

When it was over, she slept; but Denek lay there looking up at the stars through nightmist. Their joining had been a strange thing to him. She was so different, so receptive to him, so full of movement. It was an odd, almost apocalyptic thing, their joining. The suddenness of it lingered in his mind.

Easing out of her arms, Denek quickly refitted the rig to his body. He still thought of her as he did this; but when he had locked the final joint-pins into place and felt the weight of the computer on his back, he remembered everything. Chicago. He should have been returning by this time. He hoped that the City had not tried to contact him while he had taken off his rig. These were his thoughts as he injected a sleep serum into his vein.

THE HEAT of the awakening desert danced on his faceplate and he was awakened also. His eyes fell on her, still asleep, looking even more sensual than the night before. He stirred slightly and the rig picked up his attempted movements. The steel joint creaked and the sound awakened her. Opening her eyes, she looked up at him and smiled.

"Hello," she said.

Horror coursed through him as he felt his right arm point toward her even though he had not initiated it. He tried to fight the movement but the arm continued to straighten. Knee

and pelvic joints locked so that he could not take a step; he was helpless as he watched the weapons module click forth from the gauntlet.

He screamed to warn her, but the bright beam had already swept over her, slicing through her skull. He continued screaming as the computer's voice hummed in his ear: "Denek. . . be silent."

He felt a slight twinge in his left arm as the rig injected a muscle relaxant into his tense body. Soon he stopped screaming, and his body went limp in the steel cage around him.

"Why?" he asked. His mouth felt dry and thickly coated. "Why'd you kill her?"

"I merely completed a mission that you were unable to do."

"But. . . I thought that. . ."

"No, Denek," the computer cut him off. "Chicago was aware of everything. You did wrong."

He waited for more, but the machine was strangely silent. Then the rig began to move once more. The elbow and knee joints reversed themselves and he fell over on his back. Knowing suddenly what was happening, he fought the slow, inexorable movements. "Why? Please tell me!"

"It is simple, Denek. You know too much."

And that was all.

The rig continued, and his legs and arms were bent back at horrible angles, tearing away the connective tissue. The pelvic and shoulder girdles bent closer together, shoving his helmet toward his stomach, and the snapping vertebrae made popping sounds. Ligaments tore, bones cracked, and internal organs collapsed and Denek screamed. But during the

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brief instances of sanity left to him, he thought he finally understood what she had meant. . . until the darkness descended upon him.

The computer made one last organic sweep over the pulpy mass it now enclosed, and satisfied, turned itself off.

—THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

**SUSAN
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**the
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GORBETT #11 (David and Beth Gorman, 8729 S. St. Peter, Apt. 6, Indianapolis, IN 46227. Irregular, mimeo; 60 pp., 75¢ or 3/\$2. April 1975)

MAYA #7 (Robert Jackson, 21 Lyndhurst Rd., Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne NE12 9NT, U.K. Irregular, offset; 32 pp., 30 p., 4/£1.00 or \$1 us, 4/\$3.00. Spring, 1975)

DURFED #1 (Kevin Williams, 9 Whitton Pl., Seaton Delaval, Northumberland, U.K. Irregular, mimeo; 25 pp., available for show of interest.)

TRIODE #20 (Eric Bentcliffe, 17 Riverside Cres., Holmes Chapel, Cheshire CW4 7NR U.K. Irregular, mimeo; 38 pp., 3/£1.00 or \$2.50 us. October 1974, mailed Spring 1975)

EGG #9 (Peter Roberts, 6 Westborne Park Villas, London W2, U.K. Irregular, mimeo; 23 pp., available for trade, letter of comment or for contribution, not for cash. February 1975)

UNICORN vol. III, no. 2, issue 11 (Karen Rockow, 1153 E. 26th St., Brooklyn, NY 11210. Irregular, offset; 26 pp., \$1 or 3/\$2.50. May 1975)

SHAMBLES #1 (Ed Cagle, Star Rt. South, Box 80, Locust Grove OK 74352 and Dave Locke, 819 Edie Dr., Duarte, CA 91010, sample copies from Dave. Irregular, mimeo; 33 pp., available for 6 10¢ stamps (us) and response. June 1975)

"SERCON" is a fannish term that's switched connotations in the past decade or so. Originally this contraction of "serious and constructive" implied "dull and boring." As applied to a fan and his/her zine, it meant someone out to Reform Science Fiction and Fandom, and Make SF Meaningful and Respectable. Well, sf *is* respectable (I even teach it, a fact which still surprises me) and so are "sercon" fanzines—amateur magazines which discuss sf, but generally in an interested-reader, non-academic manner. If you're a science fiction reader, chances are that such fanzines will be your first contact with the organized (semi-organized?) (marvellously unorganized!) communications network of "fandom." That's why I like reviewing them here—if they're still alive.

Dave Gorman writes in *Gorbett* #11 that, with the exception of the irregular Australian *SF Commentary*, "there is not one major sercon fanzine appearing outside the United States. And science fiction and fandom is the worse for it." Luckily, the same mail delivery brought *Maya* #7 to prove him wrong.

Now, *Gorbett* is a good North American sercon fanzine. Dave lists John Bangsund and Jeff Smith (of *Khatru*), Bill Bowers' *Outworlds* and Gillespie's *SFC* as influences. Like them, he presents intelligent, well-written material by and for sf readers.

Issue #11 features a 29-page letter-column: solid, tending to discussion of intellectual issues, arguments of substance and balance concerning ideas, rather than the shallow exchanges of insults that tend to pass for the airing of views in other fanzines. It's a forum, a place for minds to meet.

I admire Dave's ability, as an editor, to attract and select the material provoking these responses. I admire his writers, in this issue headed by Doug Barbour with a lengthy essay on Joanna Russ' novels, for their ability both to express their ideas lucidly and, more important, to communicate their fascination with those ideas. Barbour, for instance, is an academic; but his analysis of *Picnic on Paradise* and *And Chaos Died* is neither boring nor jargon-ridden. He's written it not, as fannish prejudice sometimes claims, to exploit the field for academic credit—but because he cares, is passionately involved with the material. Or as Jeff Clark, another frequent contributor, notes in a letter: "I have hoped—and still hope not in vain—that I do on occasion communicate some of my particular enthusiasm toward the work at hand."

And yet. . .and yet. . .something is missing from *Gorbett*. Not concern, not ability, not enthusiasm. But personality.

"Personality?" you say. Does that mean it's a dull journal from a faceless committee, bored and boring? No, and I'm trying hard not to give that impression. *Gorbett* is enjoyable because its writers enjoy what they're about, and enjoy writing. "I love semi-colons; the world is built on their rhythm!" says Jeff Clark, discussing style.

Nevertheless, *Gorbett*'s people and especially its editor tend to share ideas but not the context of personality and background in which they exist. Once again I should make that

statement clear. I'm not even faintly interested in the details of Jessica Salmonson's sex-change. I am interested in Harry Warner Jr.'s reasons for not reading Tolkien, and for that matter in his reasons for not answering his doorbell. (It hasn't worked since the lightning struck.) It's a bias of mine, this desire to know a little more about what people are saying and why, to know the full context of a discussion.

I admire *Gorbett* and I'd recommend it to anyone interested in discussing sf. It's just that I can't always tell it from *Khatru* or *SFC*. I think I'd enjoy it more if Dave, particularly, contributed more than self-concealing editorial skills, a few comments in the lettercol, and a half-page on not buying comics which ends the zine on the tantalizing note that "I'm twenty five and want to write like Wilson Tucker and just boogaloo. . ."

Maya #7, in contrast, does have at least the beginnings of a personality, despite a transition-of-life identity crisis. Rob Jackson just took over editorship from Ian Maule, and is looking for an audience. His lettercol, thanks to a long gap between issues and poor response, is both short and dated. His fannish community seems to him to have disintegrated. "The entire UK fanzine scene seems to be at a standstill just now," he complains, tracing the decline of the typical fannish fanzine into "almost entirely a scandalsheet concerned with personalities," and the apparent death of the serious fanzine, hurt by rising offset printing costs, and by apathy. Fortunately this situation forces Rob to consider how a fanzine does attract audiences, how it creates a circle of letter-exchanging readers. It forces him to think about what he wants to do with *Maya*.

Rob's answer seems to me to embody the strength of good genzines,

and in particular of the British serious-but-not-dull tradition best represented by the much-missed *Speculation*. He wants to create "a universal medium for informed and intelligent comment on the sf of the day," but a medium in close contact with fandom and its way of life. Readable and "intellectually involving" fanzines, he suggests, will provide fandom with continuity and diversity, bringing new members into the community. An ambitious undertaking, but it comes down to specifics in his decision "to cover as wide a range of fandom's activities as possible" and in particular to "print the most interesting articles I can squeeze out of those whose writing I like."

Rob's first issue is a good, varied genzine, inspired by his own concerns and enthusiasm, attractively laid out and enriched by artwork. Harry Bell's fine cartoons should be better known abroad. (The more serious fanzines tend to lack artwork, and anything other than functional layout; this is one reason they merge in my mind.) For sf readers, *Maya* #7 has a funny, and comment-provoking, reprint on humanity's need for villains, as fulfilled by sf. There's also a perceptive, balanced essay from Christopher Priest, analyzing *The Dispossessed*. Ian Williams on his fringe participation in the student occupation of the London School of Economics in the late 1960's could have used some editing but is still a valuable piece. It has immediacy as Ian shares his sense of the moment and his place in it.

Above all, however, *Maya* #7 has Bob Shaw—fan, pro and funny, funny man—reporting on Tynecon '74. Shaw was the professional Guest of Honour at that convention. Nevertheless, his account begins: "Does this happen to other fans? I look forward to a convention for six months. . . ." Other fans. That blurring of the lines be-

tween fan and pro, the lack of barriers between those who write, write about, read and enjoy sf is the central fact of our community. *Maya*, and other genzines which capture this feeling of unity, are my personal idea of enjoyable fanzines. And any fanzine which can present Shaw earns my envy! (The piece also appeared in North America in Mike Gorra's *Random*.)

Here's Bob Shaw on losing 40 pounds:

"As it transpired, my whittled-down appearance triggered off a kind of dieting chain reaction in the British sf world which—in terms of weight alone—reduced our ranks by the equivalent of one good-sized fan. . . .

"They all said they had been inspired by me, so I guess I can claim to have improved the health of U.K. fandom, but I keep thinking about our 'lost' fan and the fanzines he might one day have produced. But then, perhaps he is happily at work organizing a separate fandom in a limbo world inhabited by all the humanity which has vanished from the face of the earth since Calorie-counting came into vogue. You can visualize them—jolly little round hominids composed entirely of banished fat—bouncing all over the place at their own little worldcons. They would be carefree creatures except that, presumably, when a person backslides on his diet and begins putting on weight again his counterpart in Fatland would begin to shrink. The word would soon go round—'Smithers is getting smaller, being recalled to his maker, looks like he'll never finish stencilling his second issue.' So, if you have lost weight and feel tempted to go back onto applie pie and cream, just remember you could be depriving a cuddly little cherub of his chance to win a Hugo."

To paraphrase Dave Gorman, I'm

twenty six, I want to write like Bob Shaw, and if I could I wouldn't care about the boogaloo.

Fortunately, Rob Jackson is as wrong as Dave Gorman in one respect. British fanzines aren't dead. *Durfed* is "written for a laf to give a few lafs" by "two expatriate Welshmen, Kevin Williams now a Gannetfan on the side of the Tyne and Neil Jones—now wintering in Brighton," with help from Gannetfandom. The Gannetfannish phenomenon interests me, but I must admit that these parodies of fiction and book reviews didn't make me chuckle. Harry Bell's cover and cartoons did, though.

Eric Bentcliffe's revived *Triode* #20 contains Michael Moorcock paroding Moorcock, Archie Mercer on the Post Office (you stop laughing when you realize it's probably all true), Bentcliffe on British fan history, a solid lettercolumn, Terry Jeeves artwork, and more. Recommended.

And finally, Peter Roberts' *Egg* #9 broke in my mailbox, spilling its fan-nish yolk all over my bills. I can't describe the zine, and I won't describe the cover, but the first page begins with a Guinness label and the rest is the Guinness of British fannish writing. Raise a toast.

Returning to this side of the Atlantic brings a return to seriousness, or rather to serious whimsy—a rare form, perhaps only legendary, as difficult to capture as a unicorn.

Unicorn is always an uneven, eccentric, sometimes fascinating "miscellaneous journal." A little magazine rather than a fanzine, it has always reflected editor Karen Rockow's diverse interests, from folklore (the subject of her doctorate) to Dorothy Sayers (discussed in this issue's editorial) to a memorable essay on potato chips. Other elements of issue #11 include a Shull cover, pleasant interior artwork, a photospread on New England har-

vest figures, reviews, fiction, poetry, the last part of a valuable Sayers bibliography, and reminiscences of Harvard in 1913. Varied, yes, and that's the problem. Like previous issues, this lacks a focus. Though many articles are interesting, the whole seems narrowly to avoid the preciousness of university little mags. Again, the magazine lacks personality. What is a UNICORN? Who puts it together? For whom? Why am I alternately interested and bored by this esoterica, left waiting for some substance?

The question arises, I think, largely because of the contrast provided by this issue's one outstanding article, "Dewlaps Up and Pencils Ready?" by Polly Mann. This collage of moments from a writers' conference does convey a sure sense of personality, of self, of focus. It is immediate and alive. In clear and marvellously subtle prose, the writer makes us understand more about writing, about being "a middle-aged woman," about being human. Or, as one of her section headings, all conference-aphorisms, puts it, "Writing is personal truth." Hers is.

To conclude with personal writing is to conclude with rejoicing. Cagle is back! The Wild Pickle Kid rides again! He's co-editing *Shambles* with Dave Locke. Now Locke writes funny stories—but Ed Cagle writes about incidents, and makes them funny, even when his attitudes infuriate me. From sercon to superfannish in seven fanzines: pick your place on the spectrum and enjoy the writing.

OTHER FANZINES

BROWNIAN MOTION #3 (Brian Earl Brown, 55521 Elder Rd., Mishawaka, IN 46544. Irregular, mimeo; 24 pp., 35¢. Described as "an editor written personalzine with pretensions to seriousness," this issue has reports on

Kwest*con 1974, Confusion 13, a Kraftwerk concert and the revival of *Black Mask* magazine.

GUYING GYRE (Gil Gaier, 1016 Beech Ave., Torrance, CA 90501. Irregular, mimeo; 43 pp., 2/\$1.00. Spring 1975) A serious fanzine, primarily concerned with discussing and evaluating sf for readers and high school teachers. I'm dubious about Gaier's aim of discovering "the most enjoyable/worthwhile/readable novels in the genre" by having readers assign each book they like a number (essentially a mark) on a "personal preference evaluation chart." Gaier also published a personalzine, PHOSPHENE.

*KOSMIC CITY KAPERS #5 (Jeff May, Box 68, Liberty MO 64068. Irregular, mimeo; 24 pp., 25¢. March 1975) "I printed whatever's here because I liked it, and that is the editorial policy from now on." A good policy. Of special interest is Jeff's inside discussion of MidAmeriCon and the limits of growth.

LAUGHING OSIRIS #3 (The Lost Queen Press, P.O. Box 1613, Cincinnati, OH 45202. Quarterly, offset; 32 pp., \$1.00 March 1975) Wayne Perin, editor this issue, presents Jodie Offutt on 5 Midwestcons and an interview with Gordon Dickson. Attractive layout and design by Streff.

MASIFORM D #4 (Devra Langsam, 250 Crown St., Brooklyn, NY 11225.

Annual, mimeo; 74 pp., 75¢. April 1975) Quality Star Trek zine.

PROTEUS #1 (Dave Fryxell, 2716 S. Lincoln, Sioux Falls, SD 57105. Bimonthly, offset; 16 pp., 60¢. March 1975.) "A Personal journal of popular culture," with an interview with Milton Caniff and uninspiring adventure-fiction.

*QWERTYUIOP #8 (Sam Long, Box 4946, Patrick AFB, FL 32925. Irregular, mimeo; 34 pp., for trade, loc, contribution or show of interest—not for sale.) An honorary Aussiefanzine, informal, well written and fun.

TWO MAGICIANS (Frank Balazs and Dave Romm, 2261 Indian, SUNYA, Albany NY 12222. Irregular, mimeo; 36 pp., 50¢.) Clubzine, highlighted by Mae Strelkov on her childhood in China.

*WILD FENNEL #10 (P.W. Frames, 105 Grand Ave., Bellingham, WA 98225. Irregular, offset; 40 pp., 50¢. February 1975). A potpourri of fiction, reminiscences on radishes and knives, artwork, Ben Indick on Ozcons, humour from Ed Cagle, Donn Brazier and Don Cole, "a metaphysical melage" by Dale C. Donaldson, and a lettercol about hockey, Guinness bheer and Strine. Highly recommended.

—SUSAN WOOD

Dept. of English
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C. v6T 1w5

ON SALE IN APRIL FANTASTIC—MARCH 11th

THE 16 KEYS by RANDALL GARRETT THE LONELY SONGS OF LAREN DORR by GEORGE R. R. MARTIN PINNOKE by J. J. RUSS TWO SUN'S SETTING by KARL EDWARD WAGNER ONE MAGIC RING, USED by ROBERT THURSTON LIMITS by JACK C. HALDEMAN II and JACK DANN MIASMAS—A LIFE TERM by WILLIAM NABORS THE DAY I LOST IT by KENDALL EVANS and many new features by TED WHITE and FRITZ LEIBER.

...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet and addressed to Or So You Say, Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.

Dear Mr. White,

It would seem, to judge from the Editorial in your November issue, that Dick's "The Pre-Persons" is doomed to be the focus of criticism for a while yet. During the last few months, a lot of people have had their shots at it; now, Terry Carr himself has seen fit to add his comments on this issue. In the interests of proper balance, permit me to register a counter-opinion.

I read Dick's story and I liked it. I found the writing good, the plot well-constructed, and the characters believable and well-delineated. True, I may not have *liked* all the characters very well, but the fact is that there are a lot of unlikeable people in this world, some of them even women. There are many who have little respect for human lives other than their own. Likewise, there are many who feel compelled to do the in thing, whatever suffering on the part of others it may entail. But even if you disagree, it is not necessary to read "The Pre-Persons" as a story about women, but as a story about one particular woman. If there actually exists in the real world even one woman like that, then the point of the story remains valid.

I can't help but be reminded of one fact, which strikes me as fairly strange. A previous story which reflected roughly the same point of view as Dick's story was Richard Matheson's "The Test," which appeared in *F&SF* sometime in the 50's. In the future society depicted in this one, you'll remember, old people are required to take an official test once each year to assure that they are competent enough not to become a burden on society. Those who fail are humanely put to sleep. For some strange reason, "The Test" never aroused as much controversy as "The Pre-Persons" has. How come?

I expect that as long as abortion remains the issue it has become in our society, "The Pre-Persons" and similar stories will invite the same type of criticism as they have been receiving all along. Unfortunately, the preponderance of opinion appearing in print will probably be opposed to my stand. After all, unborn children don't write editorials, reviews, or letters of comment.

STEPHEN A. ANTELL
45 Pineapple St., Apt. 4A
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201

I believe I've made my own position on abortion clear—I favor legal, properly medically supervised abortions available cheaply to all, over illegal, sometimes dangerously amateur abortions at extortionate prices for those who can afford them. I do not

believe the unborn have any voice in our world for the simple reason that theirs is a *What-If* existence—a potential for human existence, rather than an actual viable existence. On the other hand, I believe authors have the right to structure their stories around what themes please them, and if their stories give these themes life in the minds of their readers, I cannot object. Nonetheless, I believe that all stories which exist primarily for the purpose of pleading a special point of view do so to the detriment of their value as worthwhile works of fiction.—TW

Ted,

If Seth McEvoy is out to win fame as the leading feminist of stf fandom, he's going to have to fight me to do it.

Seriously, I think you may be a bit off when you say that feminists in stf fandom can only be shouting to themselves at this stage and not persuading anybody. Seth himself is only a fairly recent convert to feminism. He used to be a staunch male chauvinist, but he was persuaded by feminist arguments and now sees the light. That's the story he tells in his SAPS zine. And with such fiction as *The Dispossessed*, stf fans will be exposed to feminist viewpoints. *The Dispossessed* even won a Hugo!

The situation is much different in comics fandom, where the vast majority of fans see nothing at all wrong with portrayals of females like the amazonian Red Sonja and Valkyrie at one extreme and the ultra-passive, ultra "feminine" heroes' girlfriends at the other.

In stf we have the blatant sexism of Robert Heinlein and others at one end and more liberal viewpoints of writers like LeGuin and Crichton at the other end. Heinlein's last novel failed to win a Hugo. *The Disposses-*

sed did win a Hugo. At the same time, Heinlein's stuff continues to outsell LeGuin's. Obviously fandom is more feminist than the general stf readership. But I don't think I'm as pessimistic about it all as you are. We've come a long way in just 5 years. Stf is usually ahead of the world at large. And that may be the case regarding feminism.

New Orleans in '79!

LESTER BOUTILLIER
2726 Castiglione Street
New Orleans, La. 70119

Are you saying that The Dispossessed is a predominantly feminist novel—or that its feminism is the reason why it won the Hugo? Or that Heinlein's "blatant sexism" is the reason Time Enough for Love failed to win a Hugo? It seems to me that feminism was not the issue—or the point—in either case.—TW

Dear Ted,

There is a bit of rather offbeat humor in Seth McEvoy's self-appointed feminist crusade. Namely, he is a male who made his distinctly conservative and anti-feminist views known to me in old letters. I used to correspond with him a few years ago. At that time he espoused typically middleclass values with regard to the issues involved in the women's movement. Why the change of heart? I suspect Seth has found it more ego-gratifying and bolstering to the ol' self-identity to switch sides. Actually, I think his whole current schtick is decidedly phoney. I further regard his efforts on behalf of a group of which he is not a member to be a ploy on the old white liberal guilt complex. It begs the question. It asks the obvious, and refutes same with reference to specious examples which prove nothing. I haven't seen Seth's *Pig Runner's Digest*, but it sounds like an an-

tianti publication which subtly puts down the very movement he thinks he's such a partisan for at this time. In all, I consider it a very boring way to say things the real women's movement stopped considering real issues years ago.

On the other hand, Terry Carr's editorial made a definite contribution to the dialogue—what there is of it—between fans on the historical side of the treatment of women in stf. He wasn't beating someone else's drum so he could hear his own heartbeat and thoughts which made the editorial not only an intelligent exposition about where we've been, but also a treatment of clear sensitivity. He made important points. I hope other letter writers pick up his ideas for a good discussion. After all is said and done, there still remains the irreducible fact of your own gut reaction. Terry Carr's words can't change that, but at least his perspective can clarify issues in a meaningful way for those who are not already too emotionally committed.

Joe Haldeman's story was a familiar treatment of old ideas. However, it easily held my attention. If anything, his story wasn't bleak enough. He allows the world to edge toward oblivion in a situation where the point of no return is moot indeed. I suppose he agrees that the world should end with a whimper not a bang—T.S. Eliot to the rescue. Also, the story did seem very much like something seen in *Analog*. I'd forgotten most of that kind of story when I finally stopped reading that particular magazine. The crushing irony of it all resides in his main characters who fight an alien enemy, not out of patriotic zeal and commitment to grandiose ideals, but because it's something to do without being mired in the hopeless despairing boredom of dying earth.

Young and Shirley both wrote ter-

ribly chaotic and nonsensical stories. I like stories that seem to say nothing, but on closer inspection turn out to be relevant. Young has a point. Time paradoxes certainly can lead to confusing events. The more confused the time distortions the more repressed and reclusive became the A part of the only character of significance. That's a pretty point, but I wish he'd stopped with the smug assurances each part had that the preceding parts couldn't possibly know of their latter-day existence. Of course, the supreme paradox seems to be the simultaneity of effects on A,B,C,D despite the strange twists of time itself.

Shirley's story just seemed topical. I've been to parties where things happen just like in Eggman's apartment. I very much liked the way he made his main man intellectually superior to everyone there but at the same time more emotionally immature than a babbling moron. A nice paradox! In fact, I wasn't sure whether he was attempting to show the collective insanity of the masses through one lonely, twisted individual, or the way the normal crowd of concert-goers appalled the protagonist who was a focal point for the destructive deed that brought the Submerged Apocalypse.

"Heel" was an interesting idea for a story. I don't remember reading any LastMan story quite like this. It's a nice twist on a prevalent male sexual fantasy. Yes, sex can be deadly if you happen to be the only fertile male among millions of females. I'd like to see stories where the situation was reversed. I'd like to see stories where there would only be a few people left of both sexes while a strange mutation produced a third sex which was in every way either superior or inferior to the recent evolutionary trend. The variations on this theme are endless. Maybe a whole new specialty can

start in which authors compete to see who can imagine the most bizarre and ridiculous twists on this basic theme without destroying any hope of logical coherence in the meantime.

DAVE HULVEY

Rt. 7, Box 68

Harrisonburg, Va. 22801

Dear Ted,

Now I know why I spent all those years not writing to the prozines! After having talked to three separate people who didn't know me when my first letter appeared in the July *AMAZING*, I thought you might like to know that each person that read my letter thought that "Seth McEvoy" is a woman. For once, I'm glad of sexed pronouns, because in your reply to pg "Jerry" wyal's letter in the November issue, everyone will get the point of your jibe at me and not think that you're putting down women.

Although, you didn't really seem to answer Jerry's letter; his syntax is so hard to figure out that it usually takes me a couple of readings to figure out just what it is that he's saying. I'd like to say that I'm pleased with Jerry making me a member of the ruling elite; then I wouldn't have to bum cokes off my friends and wait until I can scrape up enough money to send out manuscripts. I don't know whether Jerry knows something I don't, or he got his Michigan institutions of higher learning mixed up because MSU is not any haven for the upper-middle-class, and I think that University of Michigan would be more appropriate. MSU is the *original* land grant college, and was set up specifically to serve the farmers, unlike U of M, which was a medical and theological school. At any rate, Jerry probably made the remark because he thinks I'm a student, which I haven't been since I graduated four years ago.

I'm just a bum and probably will be for quite some time—and I have scrubbed floors when I worked as a full-time maintenance man for the University, not quite upper-middle-class! Anyway, I don't think the class structure works anymore. Because there is no eldest male heir law, such as England had (or still has), property is not handed down the same way, and there's no real upper class any longer, only an amorphous middle class and a few bums like me around to make up the lower class. Or something like that—straight political jargon is not one of my strong points. But I vaguely resent being typed as a person whose ass is kissed by a sick world, as Jerry puts it.

Anyhow, the main point of my writing you is to let you know that if I gave you or any other readers (of my letter or *Pig Runner's Digest*) the impression that I am trying to set myself up as "stf fandom's #1 Feminist," then I'm sorry, because I am trying to set myself up as sci-fi fandom's #1, Feminist!

Actually, I'm not trying to do anything of the sort, OK? I am not seeking any kind of power role in fandom, and if you recall any of my fannish efforts, you'll remember that I was never into that kind of trip, that all my stuff was strictly limited to small circulation fannish fanzines—my one moment of glory was being OE of *apa-45*, which I ran for as a joke, and quit in the middle of the term when I went to *Clarion*. How anyone could think that *Pig Runner's Digest*, which is sloppily dittoed and sent out only to those who ask for it, was a power base, is beyond me. Nowhere have I claimed to be an authority on the women's movement, and as a matter of fact, I feel strictly inferior to another publication, *Witch and the Chameleon*, a truly feminist fanzine, which has ten times the readership of

my zine, and fifty times the paid circulation (my paid circulation consists of the few people who have sent in stamps). Of course, I can't tell the effect that my writing has on people, but I'm sorry if you or anyone else thinks that I'm trying to set myself up as an authority. You've seen the second issue, and I'd be curious to see if you think that I'm still #1 Fan Feminist. I really don't describe myself as a feminist, nor do I claim to represent anyone else except myself—what I'm trying to do (successfully or not remains to be seen) is to set up a forum for discussion, mostly because the *SFWA Forum's* editor may not want to devote the space to a continued discussion of sexism in science fiction, since there are more topics to be covered than one issue, no matter how important.

Anyhow, one more time: Joanna Russ, Vonda McIntyre, Suzy McKee Charnas, Pam Sargent, Suzette Hayden Elgin, and Amanda Bankier (who edits the *Witch and the Chameleon*, \$3.00 per year, 2 Paisley Avenue South, Apartment #6, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada) are doing a much better job of championing the cause of feminism than I could ever hope to do, and I know it, and I think I've always made a point to give them credit for the thankless job that they've been doing. I'm just trying to do what I can do to stand up and fight for what I see being done to people that I consider an injustice.

As a matter of fact, I seem to recall that you were on Walter Breen's side during the Pacificon II disaster. Since you've never come out as a homosexual, I have no reason to think that you are gay, yet you didn't seem to think that only people of the same preference as Walter (whatever that was/is) should stand up and speak out. So, what's wrong with me jumping in and fighting along side of the women;

I don't know whether you've thought about it, but if I ever did try to set myself up as #1 Fan Feminist, don't you think that the women would trounce me so thoroughly that I'd never recover? Which is not to say I might not make mistakes once in a while, and I have been trounced from time to time by my feminist friends, but they don't seem to mind having a male ally—there's an awful lot of tolerance for diversity in the women's movement, and nearly all of my friends these days are feminists or gays, yet I'm fairly straight myself.

I'm sorry that you lump me with the True Believers and the student radicals; I try hard to say what I believe, and there isn't really any feminist party line to follow—and I think that you do a great disservice to put down student radicals of the 60's, because I think a lot of social change happened during those student riots, and that people like Johnson, Agnew, and Nixon felt the power of the students in ways that helped to remove them from office. In the Universities, a great deal of response was generated that's just beginning now, because a lot of the riots were not just about the war, but about the way that education is being done. And if I was just going to sit around and talk to people that agreed with me, I wouldn't have spent time writing letters to *AMAZING* or trying to decipher Jerry's letters. By the way, was there any particular reason why you didn't comment on Jerry saying that the political manifestations of homosexuality are developing with *alarming* speed? Jerry seems absolutely terrified that queers are going to take over society, aided by their feminist mothers. It's his kind of attitude that *can* bring down hostile oppression in dangerous ways.

For instance, in the same November *AMAZING*, old Joe Halde-

man has a character who is an avowed homosexual, who is described as wearing lipstick, face powder, and nail polish, who "brushed hair from his eyes in a thoroughly feminine gesture, pouting a little." Joe tries to get out of it by having the character say that the paint and powder had nothing to do with his sexual orientation, but I think every reader is going to let the character (and hence the one-third of the society that is homosexual) fall into the current stereotype of homosexuals taking on "feminine" characteristics. In other words, I think that this kind of thing plays up to prejudices that stereotypes are used instead of characterization, with the harmful effect of re-enforcing the stereotype instead of trying to figure out and portray real gay people, some of whom are drag queens and some of whom look like football players.

Anyhow, I still get the feeling that you misunderstood my motives and I hope there's some way I can repair the damage because I don't want to be the spokesman for the women's movement, not now, not ever, OK? If you don't want to print this letter, I'd sure appreciate your telling the readers in some what that I'm not trying to be in charge of the feminist movement, and that if they want to see what *real* feminists (instead of fellow-travellers like me) are doing, to check out Amanda Bankier's *Witch and the Chameleon* (address above), which has articles from Joanna Russ, Vonda McIntyre, and Kate Wilhelm in the current issue.

SETH McEVoy
Box 268

E. Lansing, MI 48823

In referring to the only issue of Pig Runner's Digest I'd then seen, I said

"In it McEvoy appears to be trying to present himself as stf fandom's #1 Feminist." I'll stay with that. I did not say you were seeking a "power base" or the like; nor was that what I intended by my remark. To amplify it a bit: You project your orthodox feminist views as though you were a Maoist quoting from the Little Red Book, with dogma, the fervor of a True Believer, and without humor. You appear to be concerning yourself with conducting a pseudo-blacklist of those whose stories go against the current feminist party line; your missionary zeal reminds me of the fifties fervor of anti-Communist witch-hunters. Find those Male Chauvenists and roust them out! As for my own position, I try to avoid dogmatic positions on any side of any fence; dogma, to me, seems too close to a substitute for intelligent thought. I supported Walter Breen in what you refer to as "the Pacificon II disaster" not because I approved or disapproved of his personal morals, but because I did not consider them grounds for the actions taken against him which were high-handed, dictatorial, and tactically unintelligent. My own sexual preferences are my own business and I prefer to keep them that. I am, however, for Human Liberation: freedom from sexual roles for those who find those roles inappropriate to their own nature, and equality of opportunity for all. But I do not believe people are all equal—in intelligence, abilities, or talents—only that each should have the opportunity to achieve for him or herself what is possible. Frankly, I think the issue of feminism in stf is a red herring. In this field, more than most, we are each judged by what we do—not our sex, our age, or our race. Equally, I believe that our stories should be judged as stories and not on their ideological biases alone.—TW

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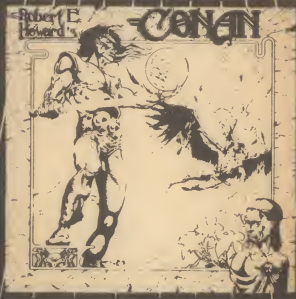
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